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TIDES

To Booth and Sue
with affection

Julian

Princeton

Nov. 2, 1946

Books by Julian Street



ABROAD AT HOME

AFTER THIRTY

AMERICAN ADVENTURES

CROSS-SECTIONS

THE NEED OF CHANGE

THE MOST INTERESTING AMERICAN

(A close-range study of Theodore Roosevelt)

PARIS À LA CARTE

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WELCOME TO OUR CITY

THE GOLDFISH

(For Children)

SUNBEAMS, INC.

MYSTERIOUS JAPAN

RITA COVENTRY

MR. BISBEE'S PRINCESS

TIDES

(With Ada Street)

TIDES

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GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1926

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TO
THOSE WHO WERE THE
BOYS AND GIRLS
OF OAKLAND

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TIDES

TIDES

CHAPTER I

A RED-wheeled runabout, drawn by a bay pacer swathed to the ears in a fly net of knotted cord, passed smartly through the early afternoon traffic of La Salle Street and drew up before an office building typical of the city and of the time. That is to say, the building was of four stories with bulky cornices jutting from a flat façade, and like all other structures of the business district, was stippled with Chicago soot.

A basement office, one step below the level of the street, was now partially shaded from the August sun by a flight of perforated iron steps leading upward from the sidewalk to the main floor, the front of which, evidently remodelled, exhibited, in place of the usual row of windows, a mammoth sheet of plate glass, toward which, as the vehicle stopped, the Negro driver and a sharpish gray-clad man who sat beside him simultaneously raised their eyes. From their position it was, however, impossible to see beyond the surface of the window, upon which the sun, high in the heavens, fell at such an angle as to turn to blinding flame the elaborate gold letters of the sign it bore: "W. J. SHIRE & Co.—REAL ESTATE—INSURANCE."

"De boss say he watch foh us," remarked the Negro. "Ah reckon he be right out, Mist' Holden."

The other nodded vaguely. He was no longer looking at the window, but at a comely young woman who had appeared around the near-by corner and was tripping toward them in a costume charmingly unsuited to the commercial aspect of the street. Her gown of bright flowered mull, edged with cream lace, might have been worn at a garden party or to the races at Washington Park track; the draped skirt, fashionably full, barely cleared the flagstones, and the waist, a basque, was snugly adjusted to the vaselike curves of a pretty figure. The tip of a pale blue ostrich plume, depending from a hat of soft straw, brightened the gold of the young woman's hair, and the brim of the hat, caught up at the side, lent to her face an accent of coquettishness.

Nearing the runabout, she glanced up and, after a swift scrutiny of Holden, addressed the Negro:

"Is my father in his office, Ed?"

"Yes'm, Miss Flo'nce, we waitin' foh him." He smiled, showing his white teeth as he saluted her.

"Guess I'm just in time, then." Again she let her eyes meet Holden's, and his feeling that she had in reality spoken to him was so definite that, half involuntarily, he raised his hand to his hat. Apparently she did not observe the gesture, but ascended the iron steps, lifting her long skirts daintily, while Holden, looking after her, reflected that a bustle, properly worn, could impart to the female figure in motion a swanlike grace highly gratifying to the eye.

"If that's Mr. Shire's daughter," he said to the coloured man, "I suppose it means we wait."

"No, suh, Ah don' reckon so. Miss Flo'nce she mos' in-gen'ally come git money from huh paw an' go right off an' spen' it."

Holden sat in silence for a brief period, during which he glanced occasionally at the doorway through which Miss Shire had passed.

"Well," he said presently, moving restlessly in the seat, "he doesn't seem to be coming out." And a moment later: "It's pretty hot out here; I'll wait inside." Whereupon he alighted from the runabout, mounted the steps, entered a door on the plate-glass panel of which the elaborate golden sign of the Shire firm again appeared, and found himself in a fenced enclosure beyond which clerks were arched over their desks.

At the front of the office, on a platform, a heavy man, backtilted in a swivel chair before a roll-top desk, was silhouetted against the spacious window, a high-light gleaming on the bald dome of his head above the fringe of reddish-brown hair. Beside his desk two men were standing, and as he spoke to them Holden heard distinctly what he said.

"I don't like mud-slinging any better than the next fellow," he loudly proclaimed, "but the Democrats started it with their lies about Blaine, and our party's got a right to retaliate. This story ought to ruin Cleveland with the church element." He rose, lifting himself by the arms of the chair, and, moving with his departing visitors toward the gate in the fence, continued:

"Far as campaign contributions go, gentlemen, I'll simply say that you can count on W. J. Shire & Co. to subscribe as much as any other real-estate firm in Chicago, and maybe a little more. That ought to satisfy you." He looked from one to the other inquiringly but with assurance.

"It certainly does. Thanks, Mr. Shire."

"Nothing to thank me for." Shire stepped down from the platform, opened the gate in the low partition, and, as they left, invited Holden in.

"Glad to see you, Holden, glad to see you. My nigger, Ed, found your office all right, did he?" He shook hands vigorously and drew Holden toward the desk near which Miss Shire had been waiting in a chair.

"Let me make you acquainted with my daughter Florence," he went on; and to her: "Mr. Luke Holden—lives out in Oakland."

"Oh, Oakland," she said, giving him her hand. "How nice!"

"You've seen Mr. Holden's house," her father told her. "I pointed it out to you and Mamma one day when we were driving—told you a friend of mine lived there—red brick house and a lady and a little girl picking flowers. I remember you remarking the garden looked kind of old-fashioned and——"

"But I thought it was right pretty, though," hastily interjected the young woman, as if the term "old-fashioned" held for her a connotation of reproach.

"My wife's from New Hampshire," Holden explained. "It's the kind of garden they used to have back there. She calls it old-fashioned herself. I tell

her it looks countrified, but she wants it that way, so let her have it."

"Well, of course——" Miss Shire's suspended tone told him she agreed with him that his wife's floral taste was peculiar.

"You won't have a garden there for ever, Holden," Shire put in. "The way this city's growing and taxes going up, property's going to get too valuable to waste land that way."

But Holden shook his head.

"No," he said, "I guess it's got to be a garden always. At any rate, it'll have to be one as long as the Wheelocks live next door."

"Old Zenas Wheelock?"

"Yes—you know him?"

"I've seen him. What's he got to do with your garden?"

"He sold me the land off his own place. Nannie—Mrs. Holden—was crazy for a garden, and that strip of his land, to the south of our house, was the only place to put it. He thinks the world of her, so he let me have it."

"Maybe he didn't lose much on the deal at that," suggested Shire with a cynical wink of his red-brown eye.

"I paid him just what it cost him."

"Well, property values out that way haven't changed much until the last few years. Guess it didn't hurt him much if he had plenty of land."

"Being a pioneer," Holden explained, "he wants more room around him than most of us do. He didn't want to sell, but——"

"That's what they all say."

"Well, he didn't want to. But he knew my wife's people back in New Hampshire when he was a boy—says her grandfather did his folks some favour or other—and Nannie and his daughter Martha went to school together; they're great friends."

"Must cost you a pretty penny keeping up all those flowerbeds," remarked Shire.

"Yes, with wages getting so high. Takes all of one man's time, and I've had to raise him to twenty-four dollars a month."

"Board him?"

"Yes, he eats with the hired girls and has a room in the barn."

"Well, you mark my words," said the real-estate man, "when Oakland goes a-booming, like she's going to, you folks that have got more land than you need will be selling it off, same as happened farther downtown. When the vacant lots are taken up, you'll sell that garden, and your neighbour, Mr. Wheelock, will sell off his side yard. That's what always happens. It's the way cities build up."

Holden was about to speak when Miss Shire, who, frankly bored by their conversation, had been glancing idly about the office, broke in.

"We live on the West Side," she said, fixing Holden with a bright look, "and Mamma and I just hate it over there. We've been telling Pappa all along that nobody nice lives on the West Side any more. It's unfashionable. I wish you'd talk him into moving to Oakland."

"I'll try," he answered, smiling. "I've been wanting to interest him in our section."

"Holden and I are starting out there right now, to look around a bit," her father informed her, "so if you've got anything on your mind, young lady, you'd better hurry up with it." He spoke indulgently.

"If I'm in the way——" Holden began, but Shire cut him off with the assurance that he was not.

"I know what Florence wants when she comes to the office," he declared with a grin. "I certainly ought to by this time." And turning to her he thrust his hand into the horizontal opening of his trousers pocket, asking: "Well, daughter, how much this time?"

The young woman did not answer, but smiled at him confidently, her green eyes gleaming; whereupon her father, with an exaggerated sigh that was clearly intended to be playful, drew out a roll of bills, and stripping several of them off, laid them in her outstretched palm.

"Will that be enough?"

Florence Shire did not move or speak, but stood smiling at the bank notes in her hand until he placed another bill there, when, with a casual "Thanks, Pappa," she leaned over, reached beneath her draped overskirt, and took from a concealed pocket a small purse into which she tucked the money.

"Be sure to show him some nice lots in Oakland, Mr. Holden," she said, bending over to replace the purse in the mysterious pocket. "I wish we lived there."

"I wish so, too," Holden replied with unwonted

gallantry; whereupon Miss Shire, bending, hand in pocket, turned her head, and from beneath the brim of her hat shot him a glance so bright that the memory of it remained with him stimulatingly after she was gone.

"Phew!" exclaimed the real-estate man as, presently, having emerged from the office, he and Holden took their places in the red-wheeled runabout. "This seat's like to cook you! If I'd known it was going to get so hot this afternoon, I'd of sent Ed for you with the top-buggy instead." He looked reproachfully at the coloured man who was standing at the mare's head, and, before taking up the reins, removed the square-crowned derby hat which was his invariable headgear, and mopped his brow and neck with a large silk handkerchief.

"Oh, it's not so bad," returned Holden, but as he spoke he edged away from the side of the larger man, who simultaneously provided more room in the narrow body of the vehicle by placing one foot on the painted step, outside.

"You slim folks never feel the heat so much," said Shire enviously, as he headed the mare southward.

Holden had a thought of suggesting to his companion that a hat of soft Mackinaw straw like his own, and a suit of some material lighter than Shire's customary black diagonal, would make him more comfortable, but sensing that these habiliments were worn by the real-estate man as a sort of uniform, intended to denote dignity and conservatism, he said nothing.

At Monroe Street they swung eastward toward

Lake Michigan, Shire guiding the responsive animal skilfully down the middle of the way, passing drays and delivery wagons at a pace which kept the run-about rattling and bouncing as its steel tires rolled over the uneven Belgian blocks.

Across the brown-columned front of the Palmer House, on State Street, hung a huge campaign banner of netting and canvas, adorned with crudely painted likenesses of Blaine and Logan.

"They're as good as elected now," Shire remarked, gazing with approval at the banner, and he turned with a look of surprise when Holden answered:

"I hope not."

"What?"

"I'm for Cleveland."

"You are? You were a Garfield man in 1880."

"That was four years ago."

"Mean to say you've turned Mugwump?"

"Yes, if that's the only name you red-hot party men know for an independent voter. I'm the only Cleveland man on our block. You needn't hesitate to buy property there. Except for me, it's quite respectable." He spoke drily, and Shire, perceiving his irritation, changed the subject.

"Nothing shows the growth of a city like hotels," he declared expansively, "and this city's moving ahead fast in that respect. Bemis tells me the Rish-aloo is going to be as elegant as anything in New York City, and there's talk of erecting a combined hotel and opera house at Michigan and Congress that'll be the largest in the world."

"I don't believe Potter Palmer will ever let the

Palmer House drop behind," returned Holden, co-operating with the other's evident conciliatory purpose.

Shire agreed. "Palmer's a smart man," he said. "There's two things in Chicago that every countryman has to see: the Stockyards and the silver dollars in the floor of the Palmer House barber shop. Funny about those dollars. There's not so many of them—couple of hundred, I guess—price of a horse. I understand they're split in half, too. But being in the floor, everybody has to go and look at them."

At the end of Monroe Street they turned up Michigan Avenue, a wide thoroughfare now half shaded by a phalanx of smoke-grimed business buildings, four to six stories high, facing, like the wall of some desert city, the open tract known as the Lake Front, where, on a floor of cinders and shaggy grass, from which the heat rose in trembling waves, groups of young men were playing baseball, backed by a frieze of freight trains which concealed Lake Michigan. But the Lake, although unseen, made its presence felt, not by cooling breezes, but by a cruel augmented light, hanging hot and metallic in the vast sweep of the sky.

"Dan Burnham wants to tear down the Exposition Building and turn the whole Lake Front into a fancy park," Shire informed his companion. "Wants to grade it up so as to hide the railroad. He's a good architect, but I never saw an architect yet that was practical. What's the matter with Michigan Avenue just the way it is? Seems to me it's as fine a street as anybody'd care to see."

They had passed the Leland Hotel with its file of hansoms and four-wheelers, and were now at the beginning of a residential district composed of simple, spacious houses, some of them in blocks, some detached, each with a flat rectangular façade of cream-coloured Joliet stone, behind a bit of well-kept lawn separated from the street by a cast-iron fence.

Shire and Holden knew many of the citizens to whom these houses belonged, and discussed them as they drove—Mr. Munn, Judge Freer, Mr. Blackstone—and indeed the houses were of a character to inform a stranger unfamiliar with these names that they were the residences of men prominent in the city's life. Such a stranger, out of his imagination and his experience of other American cities, might even have peopled the houses, assigning to each, as proprietor, a quiet, bearded man having a good library, a good pair of horses, a good wife, and good children.

Without being crowded, the street was lively with a traffic consisting chiefly of buggies, runabouts, and surreys, and occasionally a touch of style was given to one or the other of these vehicles by a spotted coach dog following at a brisk trot beneath the rear axle. Before the two men reached the end of the Lake Front a sulky with high wooden wheels overtook and passed them and Shire, having virtuously held in his mare, was pleased when a park policeman, riding a dappled gray, stopped the other driver and cautioned him. Now and then they met a bright-coloured trap or dogcart with nickel-plated lamps, or again a spider phaëton like a wheeled basket of

shining patent leather, or, most spectacular of all, a victoria, announced by pompous hoof-beats and the jingling of silver chains, with a liveried coachman driving stiffly, and a lacy lady on the seat behind, reclining luxuriously beneath her fluffy parasol.

Above Twelfth Street the houses exhibited architectural styles newer and more ornate; some were of brick with stone trim, others of coloured stone, with gabled roofs, pointed towers, turrets, bulging bay windows, and massive *portes-cochère*. For the larger and more elaborate houses Shire expressed admiration, and repeatedly he told Holden that this property, or that, had been sold through his firm, or called attention to the blue and yellow signs of W. J. Shire & Co. on lots or houses for sale or for rent.

"Michigan Avenue's got the start," he declared. "It'll always be our finest residence street, with Grand Boulevard and Drexel next as the city grows south. And it's bound to grow south on account of the superior transportation."

At Twenty-second Street, where they crossed the car tracks, he spoke again of South Side transportation.

"Now that they've got the cable cars out Cottage Grove Avenue to Oakland," he declared, "the district will build up in a hurry. People tell me I have the name of being a pretty smart real-estate man, and if I *am* smart, then you folks in Oakland live in a mighty good part of this city."

"Glad to hear you say so."

"If I didn't think so," Shire continued, "I wouldn't be here right now. I want to familiarize

myself with Oakland because I believe in it. There's something more to the real-estate business, as I see it, than just the money. If it was only money I wanted, I'd stick to the downtown end of it, but there's things besides money in this world. I'm proud of Chicago. And I'm proud of the share that the firm of W. J. Shire & Co. has had in its development. People don't realize, even yet, what a city we've got here. They *think* they realize it, but they don't. The census of 1880 gave us five hundred thousand population. Personally, I'm convinced we have more, but let it go at five hundred thousand. Well, now, just four years later, what do you think we have?"

"Six hundred thousand?"

"No, sir. Nearer three quarters of a million. I'd bet two to one Chicago's bigger than Brooklyn right now if it wasn't for the boom in Brooklyn since the opening of the Bridge last May. Let me tell you, Holden——Whoa, Roberta! Whoa, girl!" He drew the reins taut and touched the mare's back with the whip, for she had shied and broken, startled by the sudden appearance from around a corner of several tall nickel-plated bicycles ridden by young men in black tights and tiny cloth caps, who blew lustily on two-toned whistles as, balanced precariously on their high-perched seats, they leaned at the turn.

"Darn chumps!" Shire exclaimed. "Imagine riding those things on a day like this!"

"Imagine riding them at all," said Holden. "At the least little bump, up comes the hind wheel and over you go on your nose. I saw a fellow scorching

in the park the other day, and he took a header, and I guess he broke his skull."

"I wouldn't get up on one of 'em for a thousand dollars," averred Shire, as the mare, having settled down again to her gait, swung into Thirty-fifth Street, "but if I did have one," he went on, "I'd get the kind they call a 'Star'—little wheel in front. Pritchett tells me there's going to be another kind, though. He's been experimenting with a low machine that has two wheels the same size. Rider sits in the middle, on a kind of bridge made of tubing, and the pedals work a chain that turns the hind wheel."

"Doesn't sound practical."

"No, but Pritchett's quite an inventor. He's been making lots of money out of bicycles. I been thinking I might interest him in Oakland property."

At the foot of Grand Boulevard, he drove the mare up to a circular drinking fountain where he alighted and unchecked her.

"By gorry, it's hot when you stop moving!" he exclaimed, standing by the animal's head as she drank, and when presently he climbed back to his seat, he again removed his derby and mopped his head and neck with the silk handkerchief.

"How long have you lived in Oakland, Holden?" he asked, as they headed up the Boulevard.

"Eight years. I built in 'seventy-six."

"Your house must of been one of the first on the block."

"The third. Zenas Wheelock built the first. In

fact, it was on account of my wife's friendship with the Wheelocks that we moved there."

"The old man's got a son, hasn't he?"

"Yes, Harris Wheelock."

"I've heard of him. What's he like?"

"Pleasant enough."

"Much force?"

"No. Lost his wife a couple of years back, and he's been going around in a kind of a trance ever since. His sister Martha's the strong one of that generation. Keeps house, looks after her father and Harris, brings up Harris's youngster, does everything. Harris is supposed to look after the family affairs; has a little office downtown where he putters around, but the only thing he's really interested in is old books."

"*Old books?*" repeated Shire in a puzzled tone.

Holden assented. "Some of them are so old he handles them the way you'd handle a baby."

"Can't he afford to get new ones?"

"It would be a lot cheaper for him if he did," said Holden. "He collects what they call first editions." And as Shire stared uncomprehendingly, he endeavoured to explain:

"Seems it's some kind of a fad. Say Shakespeare or somebody wrote a book long ago. Well, Harris would rather have an old worn copy of it, the way it was printed the first time, than to have a clean up-to-date copy. He'll pay a big price to get the old one. He showed me a book he paid six hundred dollars for."

Shire whistled. "Must be crazy," he declared.

"No, but he was brought up soft. Zenas Wheelock went through a lot of hardships when he was young—he was only sixteen when he started into the wilderness—so he wanted his children to have an easier time of it. At that he lost three out of five of 'em, and Harris's boy is the only grandchild. Anyhow, the old man's always pampered Harris. Sent him East to college, and afterwards to Europe when he ought to have been at work; and to this day he'll go up to Harris's room on a cold winter morning and build a fire for him; and Martha will carry his breakfast up to him in bed."

"When he's *well*?"

"Yes, just taking it easy. I suppose what's in their minds is that Harris is the only son Zenas Wheelock's got left. The eldest, Lyman, was killed in the Custer Massacre the year I moved to Oakland, and a young officer in the same regiment, who was engaged to Martha Wheelock, was killed beside him. The other two children died back in the 'fifties, both on the same day."

"How'd that happen?"

"Just hard luck," said Holden. "You know there were lots of fires in those days and not much provision for fighting them. Zenas Wheelock helped buy the first fire engine the town had and was one of the organizers of the first water company—pipes made out of bored logs. He and his wife were burned out a couple of times before they'd been married ten years, so he decided to build a brick house. But in the late fall, just after they moved in, a fire started

near by and their house went, so they had to make out the best they could for the balance of the winter, and the town was growing so fast they couldn't get anything but a flimsy cottage built up on posts. I hadn't come to Chicago then—was still living back in Indiana—but I've heard tell about it. Martha Wheelock says the wind used to blow under the house and lift the carpet off the floor in waves; her father and mother had to take her and the other children out of bed nights and thaw them out at the parlour stove. All five kids got congestion of the lungs and two of them didn't pull through."

"Those old-timers had it awful hard compared with us," said Shire thoughtfully, "and we've had it a lot harder than what our children do. Anyhow, I know *I* did. I was born in a little town on the Mississippi; used to walk a couple of miles barefoot for what schooling I got, and went to work regular when I was twelve. I'll never forget the first horse I owned—had four legs and that's about all, but I thought I was the lord of all creation, taking my girl out riding. I'm not referring to Mrs. Shire," he put in parenthetically. "I met her later in St. Louis.

"Yes," he went on, "a buckboard looked grand to me when I was Florence's age, but I'd like to see a young fellow try to take her out in one. She wouldn't be seen in it. Has her own trap and she's all the time dinging at me to buy a victoria—for her mother, she says, but I don't guess she'd exactly refuse to ride in it herself."

"Probably not," said Holden. "She's your only child?"

"Yes. We lost one in infancy. How many you got?"

"Just the one. My wife's not strong."

"What I can't understand," said Shire, "is how the women that helped settle this country ever stood it. They did more work than ten women'll do to-day and had three times as many children."

"They were different," said Holden, "and so were the men. Take Zenas Wheelock. When he was nine or ten years old he went to the Baltic in a sailing ship—his people were sea captains—and at sixteen he left home, journeyed by stage to Montreal, apprenticed himself to Astor's fur company for five years, and was sent to Mackinac with a lot of French-Canadian trappers. Took them three months in canoes and open boats. And he was just turned seventeen when they sent him into the wilderness with a party that spent the winter trading with the Indians."

"Adventurous," said Shire.

"Partly that and partly because his family'd lost money. The British got some of their ships in the War of 1812 and they had a string of bad luck afterwards, so off he went. When he first saw Chicago, it was nothing but a fort and a few log cabins."

"Lord," exclaimed Shire, "what an elegant chance those early settlers had to make money out of real estate!"

"They were pretty busy keeping their scalps on their heads," Holden answered. "Zenas Wheelock came near getting killed by Indians half a dozen times, and he didn't have much money for real estate or anything else. The fur company paid him a hun-

dred and twenty dollars a year, and he sent a good part of that back to his folks. Later on, though, when the town began to grow, he did well; he was a rich man in 'seventy-one, but he held stock in insurance companies and sold most of his property to pay up losses after the Fire. Owned a fine brick block in Lake Street, but it burned, and he sold the land for what he could get, so now he hasn't much of any property except his home out here and a house and some lots downtown in Napier Place."

"Napier Place?" repeated Shire incredulously, staring at Holden.

"Yes; big brick house, Number Twelve, with vacant lots on both sides." And as if in answer to the real-estate man's astonishment, he went on: "It's a funny thing to think of now, but the Wheelocks used to live there. Just imagine—three doors from Josie's place! The vacant lots used to be their grounds."

"My God," ejaculated Shire, "how the city's changed!"

"You bet it has. Abraham Lincoln used to visit in that house. Zenas Wheelock bought the land when it was prairie, back in the middle 'thirties, so he's seen it change three times—from prairie to residence property, from residence property to a business district, and from that to"—he shrugged—"what it is now."

"I'm not my brother's keeper, or anything like that," announced Shire piously, "but I tell you, Holden, I wouldn't own property of that kind no matter how well it paid."

"That's the trouble," said Holden. "It doesn't

pay—not the way he runs it. He rents to a respectable old woman who keeps roomers—when she can get them.”

“That’s the doggonedest nonsense I ever heard tell of,” declared the real-estate man. “If a person’s willing to own such property, what’s the sense in throwing away the revenue? Oh, I don’t mean women. There’s other ways of making it pay. But, if he’s so blame particular, why doesn’t he just get rid of it? We could get him a good price.”

“Not with the restrictions he’d insist on.”

“Good Lord,” exclaimed Shire, “doesn’t he ever sell *any* land without restrictions? First it’s your garden and now it’s this downtown place.”

“Oh,” said Holden, “it’s just a sort of understanding about the garden, that’s all.”

“Nothing in writing?”

“No.”

“That’s good.” Shire gave an approving nod. “The trouble with things like that is that conditions change so. An agreement that might have been all right a few years ago could be all wrong if the neighbourhood built up. He’d probably see that, wouldn’t he?”

“I don’t know.”

“Cranky?”

“No, I wouldn’t say that. Pretty set in his notions, though.”

“There aren’t many of those old-timers left any more, are there?” said Shire reflectively. “I’d like to meet him, Holden. It must be interesting if you can get him telling what the town was like long ago.

Maybe I could talk to him about his Napier Place property, too. If I could straighten him out on that, and make him some money maybe, it would be a good job all round."

"Yes," said Holden, "but——" He shook his head doubtfully.

"Couldn't we drop in on him this afternoon?" persisted Shire.

"Why, yes, if you want to," replied Holden indifferently.

From Grand Boulevard they had turned east, and now, having driven several blocks in that direction, they reached an irregular open space formed by the junction of five highways.

"The Corners," said Holden, "our local shopping district." Whereupon Shire brought his horse to a walk and looked about.

Cottage Grove Avenue, widening at this point, was lined on either side with frame buildings two or three stories high, some of them exhibiting false fronts, all of them weathered to a uniform grayness, their ground floors given over to shops, while those above were occupied as tenements, or as small offices in the windows of which were displayed the signs of lawyers, dentists, and dressmakers. In the centre of the widened avenue a Hyde Park dummy, looking like a shed on wheels, stood waiting with its trailer; beside it the cable road from downtown had its terminus, and a powerful horse was at that moment towing a heavy "grip-car" from the southbound to the northbound track. At the junction of Oakwood Boulevard and Drexel passengers were taking seats in a

lumbering park phaëton which, drawn by a pair of sturdy grays, was about to start upon its leisurely journey toward Washington Park.

Beyond the open space, at the corner of Oakwood Avenue, rose a large frame building, unpainted, manifestly a temporary structure.

"The Republican Wigwam," Holden remarked coldly. "They're playing 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' in there twice a day. You'd think the Civil War wasn't over yet."

The afternoon performance was evidently about to begin, for a crowd composed chiefly of women and children was moving in the direction of the building as the two drove by. Having traversed the cross-roads, Shire tightened the reins and spoke to the mare, and they were proceeding at a good gait toward the lake when, suddenly, on sight of two ladies accompanied by a little boy and a little girl, Holden called upon him to draw up.

"Oh, Nannie!" he cried, beckoning.

As the runabout stopped, the ladies, followed by the children, came over to the curb, and Shire was introduced to Mrs. Holden and Miss Wheelock.

"And this is my daughter Blanche," said Holden, "and Alan, Harris Wheelock's son."

"Pleased to meet you, ladies," said Shire, lifting the unseasonable derby. Taking advantage of the opportunity, he again applied the silk handkerchief to his forehead. "I don't know how you women-folks can keep yourselves looking so fresh and cool this weather." His eyes rested upon them approvingly

as he returned the handkerchief, now moistly cohesive, to his pocket.

And indeed Mrs. Holden, delicately pretty in a gown of thin nun's-veiling, and Miss Wheelock in pearly-gray summer cashmere, did, as Shire declared, somehow achieve a look of pleasing coolness, although the costume of the period, with its tight-fitting bodice, its bustle, its voluminous skirts, and above all its rigid compression of the figure into exaggerated curves—curves corresponding with the productions of the turning-lathe then architecturally so popular—was not of a kind to suggest comfort in Chicago's stifling August.

"Where you going?" Holden asked his wife.

"We're taking Blanche and Alan to see 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' at the Wigwam."

"The Wigwam?" He frowned.

"I don't suppose it will be well played," she said, "but the children——"

"That's not the point," Holden broke in. "It's being played to keep the memory of slavery alive among the voters. It's politics. I don't want you to go to that place."

She looked down at the grass, then at Miss Wheelock, while the two children stared up at Holden helplessly.

"Well, Martha——" Mrs. Holden's tone was submissive and her step aimless as she returned to the sidewalk.

"I'm afraid it's my fault, Luke," said Miss Wheelock, moving briskly forward. "The political side of

it never occurred to me, so it could hardly affect the children. They're only ten and eleven, remember. I thought they ought to see the play because it's made history."

Her tone and manner were entirely amiable, yet there was about her a directness, a precision, which marked her as a person who knew her own mind and could upon occasion take her own part. Having spoken, she kept her blue eyes fixed on Holden's face, and Shire, though he was not in the habit of considering points of character save as they might affect his business, noticed that they shone with spirit, and told himself that it would be difficult to find two women less alike; for Mrs. Holden's dark eyes looked as if her thoughts were far away, and her voice, deep and slow, suggested a corresponding slowness in decision. But for Holden's statement that the two had been schoolmates, he would have supposed Miss Wheelock considerably the elder; she looked thirty, whereas Mrs. Holden appeared almost too young to be the mother of Blanche, the delicately pretty little girl so much resembling her, who, with an automatic gesture, half dependent, half protective, now reached up and took her hand.

A faint, ironical smile appeared on Holden's lips as he replied to Martha Wheelock.

"I don't quite understand you, I'm afraid," he said. "You say it's a play that has made history, but that the political side of it never occurred to you."

"I meant I hadn't thought of its having any present political significance," she answered placidly.

"Well, it has," he insisted. "They're waving the bloody shirt in hopes of winning the election."

"Slavery did exist, though," she said, "and it seems to me that the children, considering their ages——"

"You can take Alan where you like," he broke in. "I'm talking about my daughter—and my wife."

Her eyes remained for a moment on his face, but when she spoke it was to Alan.

"We won't go to-day," she said.

The boy glanced up at her but did not reply.

"Oh, no, Martha," Mrs. Holden quickly protested, "you must take him just the same. Please!"

"Some other day."

"But Blanche and I will feel that we've cheated him out of it."

"You needn't. It doesn't particularly matter when we go."

Mrs. Holden glanced at Alan, who was staring at a crack between the boards of the sidewalk.

"He's so disappointed," she pleaded, but Miss Wheelock was firm.

"We started to take the children out together, Nannie," she replied, "and I think we should continue together. I'm sure Alan thinks so too." She looked to him for confirmation, but as he still stared ruminatively at the crack and did not answer, she continued:

"There are plenty of things we can do. Let's go to Hubbard's first and get some soda-water. Then, if——"

"Strawberry!" cried Blanche with sudden anima-

tion, but even the mention of soda-water failed to draw a response from Alan, who had begun to kick idly at one of the boards.

"Whew!" breathed the baking Shire, and Holden took the hint.

"Well, we'll be moving on," he said, whereat Shire promptly started up the mare.

CHAPTER II

AS THE runabout drove off, spinning the sunlight on the spokes of its red wheels, Alan Wheelock stood motionless, following it with his eyes. Meanwhile the ladies and the little girl had begun to walk toward the Corners, but when they had proceeded a short distance, Miss Wheelock turned and called to her nephew.

Slowly he began to follow them.

"Usually he takes disappointments pretty well," the aunt said in a low tone to Mrs. Holden. "It's better not to notice."

"Perhaps it's the heat," suggested the other.

"Yes, I'm sure he'll be all right when he gets his soda-water."

To avoid taking the children past the entrance to the Wigwam, they started diagonally across the street, but Blanche, catching sight of the coloured posters at both sides of the door, seized her mother's hand and drew her toward them. One picture showed Simon Legree lashing Uncle Tom with a snake whip, while the other depicted Eliza crossing the ice; and as Alan came up, Blanche was voluble with questions. "Why's she doing it? Why are the dogs chasing her? Did she get across?"

"Come along, dear," urged the uneasy mother. "It's a very sad play. Smell that nice popcorn?"

Um-m! Come, we'll get some." But as she was led toward the popcorn stand, at the curb, Blanche's head was turned and her inquiries continued.

"What's he hitting the old coloured man for?"

"You heard what Father said, dear. He doesn't want you to see the play."

"Who are the men on the shore with dogs?"

Mrs. Holden was, however, engaged in the hurried purchase of a bag of buttered popcorn, and it was Alan who replied.

"Democrats," he declared darkly.

"I don't believe it!" cried Blanche. "*Are* they, Mamma?"

"Are they what?"

"Democrats."

"Who?"

At this juncture, however, a brass band inside the building struck up with a violence evidently calculated to overcome a shortage of instruments, and as Mrs. Holden and Miss Wheelock shepherded their charges across the street and down Cottage Grove Avenue, they were pursued by the strains of a medley composed of "Over the Garden Wall," "Paddy Duffy's Cart," and "Wait Till the Clouds Roll by, Jennie."

Contrary to Miss Wheelock's expectation, chocolate soda-water, usually so efficacious, did not work a cure with Alan, who, while further plans for the afternoon were discussed by his Aunt Martha and his Aunt Nannie—as he always called Mrs. Holden—plodded through his glassful in silence.

"We could take a park phaëton and go out to the

menagerie at Washington Park," Miss Wheelock suggested.

"The park'll be so hot," said Blanche.

"How would you like to go down to the lake shore and paddle in the water?"

The idea appealed to Blanche, and they set out, retracing their steps on Oakwood Avenue, which led them to the suburban railway station, built of sanded boards, at the foot of the street, where they crossed the tracks and descended to the strip of beach behind the breakwater. Here, while Blanche waded, and Alan dug aimlessly in the sand, or idly skipped flat stones across the water, the two ladies sat baking in the sun until Mrs. Holden, unable longer to endure the heat, admitted that she had a headache, whereupon they all started home.

They had not far to go. The avenue on which they lived, but a block distant, paralleled the shore of the lake, the grounds on its eastward side running back to the stone wall marking the boundary of the railroad. On the corner were two vacant lots almost large enough to be called fields, the one nearer the lake a forest of tall weeds, turning from green to a dry brown, while in the other two Jersey cows, grazing at the ends of ropes, paused occasionally to fix ruminative eyes on children running and shrieking as they played a game known locally by the cryptic name of "sting-gool."

Catching sight of Alan and Blanche, the players hailed them, and Miss Wheelock, who had planned the afternoon largely with a view to keeping her nephew and her god-daughter from running in the

sun, was relieved when she heard Alan answer, "Aw, too hot," an opinion which Blanche immediately echoed.

Yet Miss Wheelock was disturbed at her nephew's unwonted indifference. His life, like the lives of the other children of the neighbourhood, was largely spent in the vacant lots scattered up and down the avenue. What could be the matter with him? Why didn't he want to play? Was he ill? Earlier in the afternoon she had thought that he was sulking over his disappointment at their failure to see "Uncle Tom's Cabin," but it wasn't like him to sulk, and, watching him, she had begun to doubt that was it.

"I'll give him some rhubarb and soda to-night," she told herself.

But for once Martha Wheelock had failed to read the nephew she had brought up from babyhood and understood so well. Her diagnosis was incorrect. Alan's ailment was beyond the reach of childhood's remedies, for it was not an ailment of the body. He had not been thinking of the play at the Wigwam, nor, though he couldn't bear to talk, had he been sulking. Close as he felt to his Aunt Martha, he could not have explained to her, just then, what the trouble was. He wished that he could tell her, for he was dimly aware that his actions, that afternoon, had misled her; but how could he explain to her these feelings which he did not understand himself?

With the disruption of the plan for the afternoon there had descended upon him a melancholy entirely disproportionate to the immediate cause; an unhappiness due not to that disruption, but to a revelation

which had come to him, there in the hot street, informing him that this world which had seemed so perfect was not entirely a happy place. Suddenly, bewilderingly, he had realized it, not as a fact sharply defined, but as a feeling, like that of a shapeless presence in the dark, unseen but very real. And now that he sensed it there, he somehow knew that it had been there all the time.

Many things were wrong. Aunt Nannie Holden was unhappy—not just this afternoon, but always. Blanche was unhappy, too, though perhaps she didn't know it any more than he had known it a little while ago. Why were they unhappy? He thought he didn't know. But as, having passed the Holdens' house, he began to trail his fingers idly over the wooden pickets of his grandfather's fence, he saw, far up the street, a runabout, and recognized the weaving gait of the bay pacer.

Mr. Holden! It was something to do with him. He didn't like Mr. Holden. He had never liked him. That was why it was so hard to call him Uncle Luke. You didn't want him for an uncle the way you wanted Aunt Nannie for an aunt.

Having glanced back at his Aunt Martha who was bidding good-bye to Blanche and her mother, he opened the gate and started toward the front door of the friendly gray-green house, but as there came to his ears from somewhere behind the house the sound of sawing, he changed his course and swung round past the side porch, with its screen of tall lilac bushes, past the grape arbour, leading to the green-lattice summerhouse, and almost past the kitchen steps,

where, however, scenting through the open windows the aroma of hot cookies, he paused, making a brief and satisfactory call upon the amiable Delia O'Shea; whereafter he proceeded on his way, and near the gate in the board fence marking the Holdens' boundary, found Jason steadying a ladder against one of the lindens.

High on the ladder, his grandfather, wearing a flannel working shirt, was sawing at a limb.

Slowly munching his cookies, the boy stood in silence watching Zenas Wheelock ply his saw. Evidently he had been working at the other lindens, for a number of branches lay upon the ground, and Alan, aware of his grandfather's fondness for the trees, wondered at these operations and intended to ask about them when his cookies were disposed of.

Though the topmost branches of the lindens reached only a little way above the line of the flat roof, they were the tallest trees on the block, for Oakland—or Cleaverville as the district was originally called—had grown out of the shadeless prairie, and its trees were no older than the houses whose proprietors had planted them.

The sole exceptions to this rule were several ancient oaks in vacant lots to the southward of the Wheelocks', last survivors, Alan knew, of a grove cut down so long ago that no one in the neighbourhood remembered it except his grandfather and Mr. Cleaver. Zenas Wheelock took special interest in these weathered veterans whose spreading branches were gnarled and twisted like the limbs of cripples. Sometimes, when Alan went with him for a walk, they would

push their way through the tall weeds to the place where the trees stood, and the old man, resting his hand on the rough bark as if on the shoulder of a comrade, would describe the grove as he first saw it when he and Dufour, the young French voyageur who taught him the Indian language, landed here after coming down the lake from Mackinac with the fur brigade.

Alan had heard the story many times, but he never tired of it. It was not as exciting as some of his grandfather's other stories; there was no danger in it; but it made you see pictures of Oakland as it looked long ago, before there was any Oakland, and it was wonderful to think, as you listened, that you were standing right there where the edge of the grove used to be, and that where you now saw houses and fences and streets with carriages and wagons driving over them, there was then nothing to be seen but miles and miles of open prairie.

That was why his grandfather and Dufour came ashore here; Dufour had seen the prairie before and wanted Zenas Wheelock to see it. So they climbed a tree at the edge of the grove, and sat and looked for a long time—just a great open space as far as you could see, with grass and wildflowers moving like waves in the wind. Near by a herd of deer grazed, and five miles away a dot shimmering in the sun was the whitewashed wooden palisade of Fort Dearborn. Of course, they never dreamed, as they looked at the prairie, that either of them would live to see it turn into a city, and that one of them, in his old age, would build a house within arrow's-flight of where they sat.

Alan knew every detail of the story. The other voyageurs of the brigade had gone on, in their bateaux and canoes, toward the mouth of the river. They were to camp that night near Mr. Kinzie's house, the first house built where Chicago was to be. Pretty soon the two young men climbed down from the tree and walked toward the fort, following the Indiana Trail, over which refugees from the massacre had fled a few years before. There wasn't so much as a log cabin in the whole five miles, though they did pass some Indian tepees at a point which Zenas Wheelock thought would be where Twenty-second Street was now. Like the oak grove, the trail was now forgotten. Only Alan's grandfather and one or two of his old friends remembered it, but Alan knew that its course was marked now by the very avenue on which he lived, and the thought never ceased to fascinate him.

Nearly sixty years had passed since his grandfather and the young Frenchman took that walk together, but Alan had noticed that the old man frequently thought about Dufour. Some of his most exciting stories were of their adventures together, later, in the Illinois wilderness, and through these tales, on which he had been brought up, Alan had come to feel that he too knew the gay young voyageur.

Often, when something particularly interested Zenas Wheelock, his mind would turn back to his companion of long ago. "I wish Dufour could see that," he would say. Alan had heard him say it many times. He said it about the Cottage Grove Avenue cable line, and about the patent garden sprinkler with its

whirling arms, and one night he said it as they sat on the porch and watched the lamp-lighter zigzag up the avenue, touching the street lamps with his wand-like torch. But Dufour would never see any of these things, for while still young he was murdered by a drink-crazed Indian.

Still wondering why his grandfather was cutting branches from the lindens, Alan, engaged with his last cookie, was preparing to ask questions, when his aunt came rapidly around the corner of the house.

"Now, Father!" she exclaimed, looking up at him accusingly.

The old man stopped sawing, and with the back of a strong forearm wiped his brow.

"Well, Martha?"

"When it's so hot!" she protested.

"But I understood you to say you'd be away all afternoon."

"Well, I'm glad I came back," she retorted with as much severity as she could muster in face of such disarming candour.

The old man turned and, beneath brows like a wintry hedge, glanced along the row of trees.

"We shall have more light in the dining room," he declared with satisfaction.

"But *why* didn't you let Jason do it?"

"I felt the need of exercise," replied her father, and at the phrase, familiar on the old man's lips, the Negro smiled.

"I'm sure you've had enough by now," Miss Wheelock said, "so please come down."

"This is the last branch," he answered, and vigorously resumed his sawing.

She waited until the severed branch fell, whereupon, steadying himself with one hand and carrying the saw in the other, he briskly descended the ladder.

Tall, broad-shouldered, and deep-chested, Zenas Wheelock moved with an elasticity which, accustomed as she was to it, his daughter always found surprising. Save that his hair and beard had turned from gray to white, he seemed to have changed hardly at all within her memory. She knew that in his early manhood the Indians, whose pedestrian champions he defeated, had given him a name meaning "Swift Walker"; frequently he had covered forty or fifty miles on foot in a single day, swimming rivers as he came to them, whether in winter or in summer; and now that he was old, her emotions concerning his persistent physical activities were mixed, for she realized that it was difficult for one who had always been so energetic to make concessions to the encroaching years, and while she feared his resistance, she was proud of it.

There was nothing about him of which she was not proud. Had she attempted to catalogue his qualities, the first on her list would have been the conspicuously upright character which, almost as much as his connection with the city's earliest history, made him a conspicuous figure; she was proud too of his bodily strength, of his picturesque appearance, his height, his bearing, his patriarchal head with its mountainous features and snowy hair and beard, a head so distinguished that strangers would turn in the street

to look at him; she was proud even of his faults: of that stubbornness which, in conjunction with his impatient honesty, drove him, against all advice, to sell valuable property at the bottom of a panic market, after the Chicago Fire, to clear himself of debt; she was proud of his gentle, half-humorous perverseness, his quixotic trust in any one of whom he was fond, and his naïve conviction that the Republican Party was the party of righteousness, and the Democratic Party the party of black destruction. The only thing of which she was not proud was that he chewed tobacco, and to that she did not greatly object, since he was very neat about it.

Jason took the saw from his employer's hand, leaned it against the fence, and began to collect the fallen boughs, and Zenas Wheelock, with his daughter marching at his side like an amiable but determined policeman, moved across the back yard on his way to the side porch.

"What you going to do now?" Alan asked the coloured man.

"Pick berries."

That did not sound interesting, and Alan turned and skipped after his aunt and his grandfather. Coming up behind them as they neared the steps, he saw that his grandfather's light flannel working shirt was wet through the back. "You're awfully hot, Gran'pa," he remarked.

"Not so very," said the old man. "In fact, considering the weather, I'm quite cool."

Miss Wheelock shook her head in humorous resignation.

"Your grandfather wouldn't admit being too warm," she said, "any more than he'd admit being tired."

Zenas Wheelock had ascended the steps and was moving across the porch toward the screen door, but at that he turned.

"Tired?" he repeated. "Why, Martha, I could whip my weight in wildcats."

CHAPTER III

HAVING left the two ladies and the children, Shire and Holden drove to the avenue beside the lake, where they turned northward through the district in which stood the oldest houses of the neighbourhood, some tall and square, with mansard roofs and high porches unrelieved by shrubbery, others low-gabled cottages with long eaves, like those of Swiss chalets, reaching down to meet the skyward branches of tall bushes.

Under the shaft of the Douglas monument Shire swung the mare into a cross street, and after visiting other avenues, made his way to the southern extremity of the suburb, doggedly persistent in spite of his sufferings under the relentless sun, discussing with Holden, as he drove, property values, transportation, market tendencies; noting vacant lots, or lawns large enough to be dismembered, and occasionally calling the attention of his companion to a blue-and-yellow sign showing that the firm of W. J. Shire & Co. was already operating here.

The more important streets through which they passed were paved with cedar blocks and curbed in some cases with stone, in others with timber, and before each of the larger houses stood a hitching post and a carriage block, the latter, invariably of stone,

presenting to the street initials or a family name carved in Roman letters, large and sepulchral.

"Now," said Holden as, having completed their survey, they headed back, "we'll stop at my house for a nice cool bottle of beer." Whereupon the good mare, as if kindly disposed toward her owner, extended herself and carried them swiftly to the block on which Holden lived.

Less built up than any other part of Oakland, this block nevertheless contained two of the largest houses they had seen, one of them a four-square pile of red brick surrounded by spacious grounds, the other of buff-painted brick with a glass conservatory jutting from one side, and a spreading lawn embellished by a cast-iron fountain: a circular basin with a central pedestal surmounted by life-sized figures of two ragged children standing under an umbrella over which water trickled with a pleasant sound into the pool below.

When Holden mentioned the owners of these houses, Shire, recognizing the names as those of successful business men, brought his horse to a walk and gazed at the properties with respectful eyes.

"I guess Colonel Burchard and Mr. Dunham are both of them millionaires," he said.

"Yes, we claim we've got the only block around here with two millionaires on it."

"That's a right elegant fountain," continued Shire, still admiring the Burchard property.

"The more people have," said Holden philosophically, "the more they seem to want. The Burchards go away a lot. They're East at the seashore

now; they've been to Europe a couple of times, and last winter they went to Florida—nobody sick, just pleasure."

"Looks like it was getting to be the tendency of the times for people to go dashing about," Shire observed. "I know folks in this town that don't think any more of taking a trip to New York than they would of thought of going to Elgin or Rockford a few years back. Of course, it's the railroads that have made Chicago what she is, but they seem to be bringing on an age of unrest. What with these modern fast trains and George M. Pullman's sleeping cars, some people can't seem to be satisfied to stay where they belong." He flicked at a horsefly with his whip and, after a moment's silence, continued:

"My daughter Florence got that way last summer. Nothing would do but her and her mother should pack up and go East. They liked Niagara Falls and Saratoga Springs all right, but at the seashore Florence didn't have such a good time as she expected. Those Easterners are pretty clannish; I guess they don't think much of us folks out here."

"I hardly think," said Holden, visioning Florence Shire's green eyes and her smile, "that your daughter would find herself left out wherever she might go."

"She's attractive all right," the father admitted. "I guess maybe that was the trouble. The women at this watering-place she went to mostly all knew each other and they weren't looking for competition when the men came from the cities Saturday and Sunday. Florence did get acquainted with some of the men, but the women acted mean."

"You see," he went on, "a lot of these Easterners owned cottages and went there year after year. Some of our wealthy families are beginning to do the same, I notice. There's quite a colony at Charlevoix, for instance, and at a couple of places in Wisconsin."

"Mr. Dunham's talking of building a summer residence at Lake Geneva," Holden remarked.

"That's another tendency of the times," said Shire. "Makes a man wonder where all the money comes from. I know of a house being built at Lake Geneva that's going to cost upward of nine thousand dollars. Three bathrooms—one of them just for the hired girls. I don't see what we're coming to if people get to pampering their help like that."

Upon coming abreast of Holden's house, which stood a little way beyond the Burchard place, on the other side of the street, facing the lake, the real-estate man turned his horse, drew up at the carriage block, and eased himself slowly to the ground.

"That beer'll certainly go fine now," he sighed as he tied the mare to a cast-iron hitching post surmounted by a horse's head in miniature.

The wide lot was bordered at the front by a fence made of round iron pickets of alternating height mounted on a stone coping. Holden opened the gate, and the two moved toward the house, which was of red brick and brown stone with a sharp gable and a pointed tower shingled in a geometrical design with red and blue slates, above which spikes of ornamental ironwork pointed toward the burning sky.

"Whew!" Shire exclaimed in relief as he entered a

hall dimly lighted by a window of multi-coloured leaded glass. "You certainly keep this place cool."

Holden moved to the foot of the stairs, which were of yellow oak with a heavy railing and a massive carved newel-post surmounted by the figure of a partially draped nymph in bronze holding aloft a gas jet.

"Oh, Nannie!" he called upward, but it was Blanche who looked over the balustrade and answered.

"*Sb-h*, Pappa," she warned in a loud whisper. "Mamma's just come in with a headache. She's gone to lie down."

"All right," replied her father, and without more ado he led Shire through the double sliding doors to the dining room, where he invited him to sit down and make himself comfortable.

The real-estate man did not require to be urged. As his host disappeared through the pantry door he dropped into an armchair and, unbuttoning his vest, looked about the room, which he found admirable.

Here, as in the hall, the woodwork and furniture were of yellow oak. A long sideboard built into a shallow alcove met at either end the panelled wainscoting, above which the walls were covered with brown and gold lincrusta Walton, hung with framed engravings of hunting dogs and game birds. Even the frames of these pictures were of oak, wide, flat, and highly polished, with silver beading at the inner edges, and a final touch of elegance was contributed to the room by the chandelier depending from the ceiling over the centre of the table, for it was of bronze, and

each of its eight branches, embellished with knobs, scrolls, and strings of metal beads, terminated in a sphinx's head.

Through a screened window, open to the garden, wafted the fragrance of flowers accompanied by the faint droning of bees, and from farther off the rhythmical pull and thrust of a saw which, coming through the heat, suggested to Shire the sound of hard breathing. The thought of someone sawing out there in the sun gave him, as he sat in the comparative coolness of the dining room, a sense of well-being which increased as he saw Holden emerge from the pantry carrying glasses and two dripping bottles on a tray.

A cool mist formed on the tumblers as the host slowly poured the amber fluid, and the creamy collar was still settling at the top of his glass when he raised it to Shire, saying, "Drink hearty!"—a courtesy which the thirsty real-estate man returned by making with his own glass an economical gesture, and muttering something, presumably a toast, which was, however, drowned in the foam as hastily he lifted the beverage to his lips.

There was a moment's silence as they drank; then, "*Ab-b!*" they sighed together, lowering their glasses.

Holden had remained standing, and now, instead of sitting down, he moved to the open window and looked out beneath the partly drawn shade.

"I thought so," he said, as if speaking to himself; and turning to Shire: "That's Zenas Wheelock thinning out branches in his trees."

"Good Lord, on a day like this! How old is he?"

"Seventy-four."

Shire sighed. "I'm only fifty-three," he said ruefully. "Wish I felt like that. Mrs. Shire and Florence are all the time telling me I ought to exercise."

Holden moved back to the table and sat down. "Nonsense," he replied, "I don't exercise and I always feel first rate. It's a habit, and like all habits it's hard to break. That's the trouble with *him*." He jerked his head in the direction from which the sound came. "When he was young he *had* to cut down trees to build cabins and clear the land, and now he's like an old beaver that doesn't know how to quit. He *thinks* he's sawing off those limbs to get more light in his house, but that's not it. It's just that he's always got to be doing something."

Shire, drinking, had kept his eyes on Holden.

"Darned if I don't hate to hear him!" he declared, setting down his glass; whereupon, as if in answer to his words, the sawing ceased.

Holden rose, moved again to the window and looked out.

"Martha Wheelock's come to stop him," he said over his shoulder.

"Well, I should think so!" exclaimed Shire. "She looked like a woman of sense."

"Yes, she's got sense," admitted Holden grudgingly. "I was wondering what she'd do. She's pretty bossy about most things—too bossy to suit me—but I've got to give her credit for handling her father."

When the sawing was resumed, Shire joined his

host at the window, and the two watched until, upon the falling of the limb, the old man descended the ladder and moved with his daughter toward the house, their heads and shoulders visible above the top of the board fence.

"We'll give him time to get cleaned up before we call," said Holden, moving over to the table; and as Shire bent his head back, draining his glass, he continued: "In the meantime, how would another bottle set?"

"Why, fine," replied his guest, and as Holden's bottle was only half empty, the fresh one which he brought from the icebox went entirely to Shire.

"I gorry, that's fine beer!" he exclaimed, after taking a deep draught, and though Holden assured him that it was merely the regular product of a local brewery, the other protested, between gulps, that the beer was exceptional, that he had never tasted better, that this was the beer he should henceforth buy for his own household.

"Beer's my steady drink," he declared, as he poured the last of the bottle into his glass. "Ruby, my wife, came from St. Louis. A great beer town. Germans. Raised on beer." Again he threw his head back, and when he set the glass down it was empty. "She'd tell you, like I do, that's fine stuff you got."

"Have another bottle," invited Holden.

"Well, I might," assented Shire after a momentary show of hesitation, and again, with the third bottle, he eulogized the beverage.

"I was doing pretty good in a business way when I

married," he told Holden between draughts. "Salesman. Used to drive all over southern Illinois; knew every mudhole; but o' course, I was nothing like as well off as I am now. Like wine, Holden? Plenty at my house—claret, Rhine wine, champagne, anything you'd ask for. I tell Ruby she could take a bath in champagne if she wanted to, the way we're fixed now." He laughed. "She'd look mighty pretty in a bathtub full of champagne—got a skin like a baby. Maybe you noticed Flo's skin? Gets it from the old woman—ain't hard to see she didn't get it from me!" Evidently the idea struck him as exceedingly droll, for he shook with mirth, and tears streamed from his eyes.

"What was I saying? Oh, yes—beer. Ruby says to me, she says, 'We'll have the best of wines to set before our friends, but for me,' she says, 'give me good old beer every time.'" He drank, and gazing at his glass with profound solemnity, continued:

"Like I was telling you about buckboards, Florence, she don't care much for beer. Tendency of the age. Prefers champagne, but don't get much, you bet, 'cause Ruby brings her up sensible. 'You're a beautiful girl, Flo,' she tells her; 'you got a beautiful form and a skin like a baby, but you're only nineteen and don't you go making no fool of yourself drinking champagne,' she says. 'You stick to beer,' she says, 'like I do, moderate, and it ain't going to hurt your looks or your morals either. The proof of the pudding's the eating,' she says. 'Look at me—past forty.' And," continued the admiring husband and father, "it's a fact, if I do say it myself, Ruby's as

fine a looking woman of her age as you'd want to see. I'd like for you to meet her, Holden."

"I certainly hope to."

Shire, drinking the last of his beer, fixed his red-brown eye on Holden over the rim of his glass, and stared at him as if to hold his attention until, having finished, he set the glass upon the table.

"Fact is, Holden," he continued in a confidential tone, "I'm thinking pretty serious about buying one of these lots out here and building me a house."

"Fine!"

"And if I do put up a house," he continued impressively, "people around here'll see that W. J. Shire ain't a man that does things by halves. She'll be a daisy, let me tell you. Burchard or Dunham or nobody'll have a better house." He nodded gravely. "Me and my family will want to take our proper place in the neighbourhood, of course. We'll want to get acquainted with the Burchards and Dunhams and Wheelocks—the whole kit and caboodle." Still looking his host in the eye, he belched loudly but with a certain dignity, whereafter he placed his hands on the arms of the oak chair and lifted himself to his feet.

"Well," he said, "I reckon it's time we was going next door."

Holden, however, had been watching his guest with narrowing eyes. In spite of Shire's vaunted cellars, the three bottles of beer had plainly affected him.

"Don't you think perhaps we'd better put that call off until another time?" he suggested. "You'll be out here again, and——"

"Why should I put it off?" demanded Shire, drawing himself up haughtily. "Wasn't we sitting here waiting for the old man to get washed up? That's cert'nly what *I* thought we was sitting here for. If you mean I can't conduc' myself like a gen'leman after a few glasses beer, why all I got to say is——"

There, however, Holden broke in with a denial.

"Nonsense," he exclaimed, rising and clapping Shire on the back with exaggerated good fellowship, "who said anything about beer? I was thinking of your long drive back, that's all."

"Oh," said Shire, mollified, "never mind that. With a mare like I got, that don't amount to anything. Two-forty on a plank road."

"Come on, then," said Holden, leading the way to a side door from which steps descended to the garden, and Shire, taking up his hat, followed.

"Fact is," he said as they moved toward the gate in the board fence, "I guess I *was* a little talkative in there with you, but that's among friends. Never worry 'bout me. Safe as church. You'll see."

And indeed, his manner as he spoke to Miss Wheelock, whom they found reading to her nephew on the side porch, was so punctilious that Holden felt reassured.

Alan was sent to find his grandfather, and the three sat in rocking chairs chatting until, accompanied by his grandson, the old gentleman appeared, his face shining and rosy from the bath.

"I recognize the name," he said affably, when Holden introduced Shire.

"I guess lots of people do," the other replied, as

they shook hands. "My firm spent over twenty-two hundred dollars last year just on signs."

"Well, I hope we won't see any more of them around here," remarked the old man, as with a gesture he invited them to resume their seats.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, then," put in Holden with his characteristic dry little smile. "I've been trying to interest Mr. Shire in Oakland property, and he tells me he is favourably impressed."

"I'm sorry to hear it," returned Zenas Wheelock placidly, as he sat down.

"You don't mean to say, Mr. Wheelock," asked Shire incredulously, "that you'd be sorry to see an active real-estate market out here and prices going up?"

"Yes, I should."

Perhaps impelled to do so by the look of stupefaction on the real-estate man's face, Miss Wheelock spoke.

"I think, Father," she said, "that Mr. Shire doesn't quite understand your attitude."

"Oh, I'm sure he does," answered her father.

"No, sir," said Shire, "I'm blamed if I do! If this neighbourhood booms, it's money in your pocket, so I don't——"

"If this neighbourhood booms," put in the old man, "it means crowding. I've been crowded out of two neighbourhoods already because real-estate firms became interested in them. I'd about as soon have a real-estate man interested in my residence property as have an Indian interested in my scalp."

"Why," protested Shire, "one of the surest signs

of Chicago's greatness is the steady increase of real-estate values. The only places where values don't increase is dead towns. This city's growing, and it's going to keep on growing in spite of what anybody wants. The same thing that happened further downtown is what's going to happen here."

"That's what I moved out here to avoid, Mr. Shire."

Shire looked out over the expanse of side yard with its grape arbour and summerhouse, its fruit trees and its stable on the alley to the rear.

"Well," he said, "for the life of me I can't see what you got to worry about, no matter how much this neighbourhood builds up—not with all this property you've got. Why, you could sell off a fair-sized building lot and still have plenty of room."

"I didn't buy to sell."

"I understand you sold off a strip at the other side of your house," Shire answered, jerking his head in the direction of Holden's garden.

The old man's lips parted as if he were about to speak, but he closed them again and there was a moment's silence which was broken by Martha Wheelock, who rose, saying:

"If you'll excuse me a moment, I'll see about some cake and lemonade."

"None for me, thanks," said Holden.

"Nor me," echoed Shire; and with a wink at Holden he added: "My drink's beer."

"I am sorry we have no beer to offer you," Zenas Wheelock said.

"Oh, I didn't mean I wanted any. Fact is, I

just had some, and lemonade don't set good on top of beer." He chuckled. "I'll never forget once when a St. Louis fellow, an old flame of my wife's, come to our house, and Ruby gave him a couple of bottles of beer, not knowing——" But there his story was cut off by Zenas Wheelock.

"I won't have any lemonade either, thank you, Martha," he said, with quiet emphasis; and turning to Shire, continued:

"My memory of transactions in Chicago real estate reaches back to the great period of speculation that collapsed with the panic of 1837. The town went mad; it was like what happened later in the first mining camps out West. You'd be walking along the street and real-estate sharks would grab right ahoid of your coat and try to drag you in. There was a coloured man—Darky George, he was called—who used to get all dressed up and ride around on a horse announcing land sales. Great crowds would gather and property that sold for a hundred dollars one week might go for several thousand the next. My friend Isaac Arnold was a young attorney then, and he took in as much as three thousand dollars in six days making out land titles.

"But," he went on, "mighty few Chicago people made anything out of it, and many were ruined. The men who got the money were mostly rascals from outside." He shook his head. "No, Mr. Shire, I don't want to see any more booms. A boom's just the other end of a panic."

"Wasn't it about that time that you bought your downtown property?" asked Holden, but at this

juncture the conversation was checked by the appearance of Harris Wheelock, who slowly pushed open the screen door and stood looking vaguely through his gold-rimmed eyeglasses at the group on the porch. Fairly tall, he was of spare build; his clothing hung loosely on him and his complexion was like that of a wax figure into which the artificer has failed to put sufficient colour.

When Holden introduced Shire, Harris muttered some words of welcome and offered a hand which, though it looked large, seemed to collapse in the other's grasp.

"Any news downtown?" Zenas Wheelock inquired of his son.

"No. Mighty hot." Harris ran a hand through his hair, which was turning from brown to gray and, in marked contrast to his father's brushlike white mane, was soft and fine.

"Did you bring the evening paper?" asked the old man.

"I think so," said Harris, dropping limply into a chair. "I was reading it on the train—think I brought it home with me."

"You were saying," said Shire, leaning forward to command Zenas Wheelock's attention, "that you bought downtown property at the time of that boom long ago."

"Not during the boom. In the panic, afterwards."

"Still hold it?"

"Yes."

"Whew! Downtown property bought in the 'thirties at panic prices!" Shire spoke like a greedy

child admiring a birthday cake; nevertheless, there was interrogation in his tone and in his face as he added: "I certainly congratulate you, Mr. Wheelock, on having such an investment."

Under their shaggy brows the old man's gray-blue eyes looked out from their frame of cross-hatched wrinkles to the lawn where Jason was setting out the patent sprinkler, and Shire, concluding that he had not heard, repeated in a louder voice: "Yes, sir, I certainly congratulate you."

"Thank you," answered Zenas Wheelock, still looking at the lawn.

"That reminds me, Father," his son put in, "Mrs. Boddy came to see me to-day. This time it's a leak around one of the chimneys. I ordered it repaired."

"Hm-m!" A noncommittal sound came from the old man's throat, and there ensued a silence which was broken by Shire, who in a casual tone inquired:

"Where's the property located?"

But again Zenas Wheelock apparently failed to hear, and Shire turned with a repetition of the question to Harris, whose thoughts were evidently far away, for he gazed blankly at Shire for a moment before replying.

"Oh—Napier Place."

This time Zenas Wheelock heard clearly enough.

"My former residence," he quickly supplemented. Shire appeared surprised.

"Well, well," he exclaimed, "the city certainly has changed!"

"Yes," said the old man reflectively, "and it's going to change still more."

"Why, that's exactly what I've been telling you," declared the real-estate man with the air of one victorious in argument.

"But," said the other, "the change I speak of will be for the better, not the worse."

"So will the change *I* speak of."

Zenas Wheelock raised his right eyebrow, and his face for a moment took on a quizzical expression, but when he spoke he ignored the last remark.

"Land in Napier Place," he said, "will some day be very valuable. I may not live to see it, but I trust that you may, and I prophesy with confidence that my grandson will." He indicated Alan, who was seated on the steps, apparently engrossed in the book his aunt had been reading to him when the two visitors arrived.

"Why," asserted Shire, "it's valuable now."

"Not to decent people."

But with that statement Shire promptly disagreed.

"Mr. Wheelock, you're wrong about that. Your property ought to pay you well without"—he glanced apologetically at Miss Wheelock—"without being put to—to any improper purpose."

The old man merely gazed across the lawn, but Harris Wheelock appeared interested.

"We rent to a Mrs. Boddy," he explained, "a respectable woman who takes roomers; but the house is never full and she barely scrapes along. Naturally, nobody wants to live in such a district if he can afford to go elsewhere. The result is that for years we've been just about able to cover repairs and taxes. In fact, we don't always

manage that, but there seems to be nothing else to do."

"On the contrary," asserted Shire, "there's several things you could do. I know all about land values and rentals down there. I have to; it's my business, same as it's my business to know values every place else in the city. You see, Wheelock, parties that own that character of property most generally don't care to handle it themselves." Harris nodded. "So they do business through agents," continued Shire. "Naturally we ain't looking for business of that kind, but we recognize the fact that we're a real-estate firm and can't afford to be too finicky. A foot of land's just a foot of land to us, wherever situated, and if we're the agents, then it's our business to make that foot of land *pay*. Why, you'd hardly believe it if I was to tell you the names of certain parties that own property in that district. *They* don't know anything about what's going on—Lord bless you, no! It's the agent. S'pose they figure that what they don't know ain't going to hurt 'em." He winked broadly at Harris; then turning to the old man, and discovering a frown upon his face, he took a less cynical tone, continuing:

"I'm not my brother's keeper, but I'm frank to say I don't see how decent people can tolerate that sort of thing, no matter how high the rents are. What's more, it ain't necessary. If I owned property of that character I'd be mighty particular about my tenants, but just the same I'd make it *pay*."

"May I ask how?" inquired Harris.

"That," said the real-estate man airily, "depends on the way a person feels about a lot of things. A man can be finicky about one thing and not about something else. Some folks would feel all right about letting property to a good honest gambler, say, that would pay a high rent, but others wouldn't. Some might prefer a saloon. There's saloons and saloons, you know. You get a good German saloon-keeper and you'll find——"

"Mr. Shire," put in Zenas Wheelock, "my wife and I spent many happy years in Napier Place. Mr. Lincoln visited us there, and it was there that my wife died. I was reluctant to leave, but commerce crowded me out. What has happened to the neighbourhood since is to me a source of great unhappiness, and your suggestions are highly distasteful."

For a moment Shire stared at the old man, who, from beneath his shaggy brows, returned his gaze.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Wheelock," he said. "I understood your son was asking me a general question and I was giving him a general answer. I certainly respect your sentiments, sir, and that brings me to what I was going to say. I was going to say I thought the best thing to do would be to sell. You could get a good price, and that would be an end of all your bother."

"I should be glad to sell to any respectable person who would furnish proper guarantees."

"Guarantees of what?"

"That the property would never be put to base uses."

"Your proposition's not practical, Mr. Wheelock. A seller's responsibility ends when the sale is made."

"That is a matter of opinion."

"Well," said Shire, "it's simply out of the question to ask a man to guarantee what he's going to do with land he buys."

"I shouldn't ask that. The guarantee I should require would cover only what the buyer was not to do."

"Well, you'll never be able to make any such arrangement."

"I don't expect to. I expect to hold the property until changes in the district make such a requirement unnecessary."

"I'm afraid you'll hold it a good while, then," answered Shire with a faint smile. "I can't agree with you that land in Napier Place will ever be worth more than it is now."

"But you are a real-estate man," Zenas Wheelock answered, and Shire wondered what made Holden smile.

"Yes, and my judgment on Chicago property is considered pretty good," he answered. "Just as a matter of interest, Mr. Wheelock, would you mind stating why you look for an improvement down there?"

"Because of the proximity of Napier Place to the railroad stations."

Shire shook his head. "Some of the worst slums in the whole country are near railroad stations," he said.

"That will change with time," Zenas Wheelock

replied. "You're comparatively a young man, Mr. Shire, but you're older than our railroads. And of course, my memory runs far back of that. We were very proud of our stage lines in the late 'thirties and early 'forties when John Frink consolidated three thousand miles of routes. Just in that period we began to get a few steamers, too. The first one came in 1832, but a vessel couldn't get into the river then because of the bar at the mouth. She lay offshore about the foot of Madison Street and the whole town turned out in its best bib and tucker to see her. Then, when we made harbour improvements and began to get used to steamers, along came the railroad. We had a tremendous celebration over the first train in the fall of 'forty-eight. That doesn't seem long ago—only thirty-six years."

"Yes," Shire put in, "I can remember the excitement. I lived down in southern Illinois then, but of course we heard about it."

"Modern transportation is still new," continued the old man. "Maybe you recall when they first tried night cars, as they called them. Wooden shelves to lie on. That was thought a great improvement. Then in the 'sixties along came George M. Pullman. His first business in Chicago was jacking up buildings when the city grade was being raised. Back in New York State, where he came from, he'd worked in a cabinet-maker's shop, and presently he got the Chicago & Alton road to let him have a couple of coaches to experiment with, and turned them into sleeping cars. They ran them between Chicago and St. Louis, and that was thought

wonderful, but they were too small, so he spent a lot of his own money and built the *Pioneer*. That car was called the wonder of the age, but it was nothing to what he's done since.

"My experience of life," he continued, "seems to indicate that human progress goes by cycles. First you get a period of experimentation and crude development; then, with prosperity, comes a period of reflection and adjustment; and finally you get enlightenment and begin to plan with the future in mind. It appears to me that the railroads are just passing into the second cycle and that this city's in a corresponding stage. The big changes have only begun, but they're coming fast. I expect we shall have railroad stations on a scale people hardly dream of now, and the land near them will be so valuable that buildings will pile up higher than anything we know to-day. That's what I'm looking forward to for Napier Place."

"How high do you imagine buildings will go?" asked Shire.

"Twenty stories, possibly."

"No, Mr. Wheelock," said the real-estate man, "that's out of the question. I happen to have studied the problem of building heights. I know all about it. Five or six stories is the best height and ten's about as high as you can go. For one thing, the more your building weighs, the more she's bound to settle, especially in soft soil like ours; for another, the higher you build the thicker your walls have got to be to carry your loads, and all that masonry cuts down your floor space too much. Then there's the

question of elevators. If your building's too high one elevator can't give satisfactory service—too slow to suit people in this age of hustle—so you put in another elevator, and there goes more of your floor space. And on top of that you got to consider safety; if you make your elevator cable more than so long she's liable to drop. So you see your idea isn't practical."

"Not at present," agreed the other, "but man seems to find ways, ultimately, to make whatever he needs."

"It doesn't strike me so," returned Shire. "Look at all the things we need that we haven't got. For instance, if man could make what he needs, wouldn't he make something to stop the cholera epidemic in Europe and yellow fever down South?"

"I don't doubt that will be done in time. We're pretty well rid of smallpox epidemics, and they tell us someone in Paris has found a cure for mad-dog bite. And who knows what electricity's going to do for us? The scientists say it's certain to replace gas for illumination and I see by the papers they're propelling street cars with it somewhere in the East."

"Oh," said Shire, "they'll try anything. Darius Green tried to fly, but he didn't get far."

"I shouldn't be surprised if flying machines would some day be successful," Zenas Wheelock said. "I don't believe I'd have thought so forty years ago, but I've been fooled so often by the inventors that I'm afraid to be a skeptic any more."

"Well, Mr. Wheelock," said Shire with a smile,

"I guess there's a good many matters you and I wouldn't look at quite the same."

"Undoubtedly," replied the old man.

"But there's one thing I'm sure we agree about," continued Shire, "and that's the district you live in. It's certainly a mighty nice part of town. How long has it been settled?"

"My neighbour Charles Cleaver built the first house in 'fifty-three," Zenas Wheelock replied. "He paid the Illinois Central thirty-eight hundred dollars a year to run trains so other settlers would come. It was called Cleaverville until a few years ago, and that ought always to be the name—not Oakland. It wasn't trees that made Chicago; it was men."

Shire rose. "Well," he said, "all this has been mighty interesting. It isn't often a man meets one of the real old-timers any more, and I'll hope to have the pleasure of talking with you again. I expect to be coming out this way oftener from now on; in fact, I wouldn't be surprised if I'd get me some land and build out here one of these days, though I don't want anything said about it now."

"I shall not mention it," Zenas Wheelock assured him, and again his right eyebrow rose whimsically.

"If I do decide to build," continued Shire impressively, "I'll guarantee it won't be a house anybody around here will feel the need to apologize for. No, sir, it'll be something choice—a mansion." Having shaken hands with Zenas Wheelock and Miss Martha, he came to Harris.

"Holden tells me you have some nice books," he

said, pumping Harris's hand. "I must get you to show 'em to me some day."

"You're interested in books?" Harris brightened, and as Shire and Holden started toward the steps he moved along with them.

"Can't say I know much about 'em, but I'd like to look at 'em."

"I'll be glad to show them to you."

Discovering Alan on the steps beside the lilac bush, Shire playfully pinched his ear in passing.

"Reading, eh, young man?" he said, and as they strolled on toward the street he smiled at Harris, saying: "Like father, like son."

As a matter of fact, however, Alan had not been reading. His eyes had travelled repeatedly down the same page but had transmitted no message to his brain, which had been occupied with the talk on the porch behind him. Strange talk. He had comprehended only part of what was said, but the part he didn't understand was somehow interesting, too. Mr. Shire was a funny-looking man, he thought, as he watched him walking toward the gate between Mr. Holden and his father. Somehow he wasn't like the people who usually came to call. Most people tried to get his grandfather to tell about adventures with the Indians, and Alan liked to be there when those stories were told, but Mr. Shire hadn't asked for stories; he seemed to want to do the talking himself.

What was it about that downtown street that seemed to worry them, he wondered? Napier Place. The family lived there long ago, before he was born.

He had heard his grandfather tell of Lincoln's visit, but somehow he had thought the house was burned in the Chicago Fire. People talked as if everything burned then. But it was still there. Some day he'd like to see it.

He was about to turn and speak of this to his Aunt Martha when from the porch behind him came her voice.

"A singular individual," she remarked.

"Yes," replied her father. "I'm sorry Luke Holden saw fit to bring him here."

"So I observed." From her tone Alan knew that she was smiling.

"I tried not to show it."

"You're not a good dissembler, Father."

The shadow of the grape arbour had been slowly reaching out across the lawn; Jason came from the back yard and turned on the hose, setting awirl the spidery arms of the automatic sprinkler; presently Alan's father returned to the porch, and the boy's thoughts, which had drifted away from the talk behind him, came back to it again.

"Sometimes," he heard his grandfather say, "I regret selling that land to Luke Holden."

"Oh, no, Father," said Martha, "not when Nannie loves her garden so."

"Nannie doesn't own it."

"But there's an agreement," put in Harris.

The old man made no direct reply. "Luke says he's going to vote for Cleveland," he announced grimly; and after a brief silence he added: "I dislike that man Shire."

"Of course he's common," said Harris tolerantly, "but I've heard he's very clever in a business way."

"Oh," bantered his sister, "he won you over by asking you about your books. That's why you walked along with him."

"He drives a good horse," said Harris, undisturbed.

"I hope he won't drive it out here any more," declared Zenas Wheelock.

"Well, Father," answered Harris, "I'm sorry to tell you your wish isn't going to come true. Luke's invited him to bring his family out to dinner."

"Does he know the family?" Martha asked.

"He's met the daughter and he says she's a howling beauty."

"First thing you know they'll be moving out here to live," prophesied their father gloomily.

"In a 'mansion'," supplemented his daughter, accenting the word derisively. "That will give this modest region something to live up to, won't it?" Her irony drew a grin from Harris, but there was no response from the old man, who was pacing up and down the porch, and Martha Wheelock, perceiving that he was more disturbed than she had supposed, took another tone:

"I don't think there's any need to worry, Father," she said gently. "Even if he should carry out his dark threat, there are enough nice people living around us to give the neighbourhood its colour. A Shire or two won't make any difference."

But her soothing words left him unmoved.

"It's a great misfortune," he insisted. "I've

seen men like him before. He's crazy after money and he'll get other people crazy. It's contagious. They'll be slicing up the land and selling it in narrow strips to make a few dollars more out of it. I shouldn't be suprised if we'd have renters coming in before we're through." He stopped walking and turned toward his daughter. "No, Martha, don't you believe it won't make any difference! I tell you, one man like this Shire—maybe a well-meaning man, too—can change things as you'd hardly believe possible. I hope I'm wrong, but I'm mightily afraid we're in for a bad spell."

Struck by the deep feeling in his grandfather's voice, Alan had turned, and from his seat on the steps was looking at him. There was an immense impressiveness about him as he stood there. He reminded Alan of a picture in his book of Bible stories, and that image of him was so deeply etched on Alan's mind that no other vision of his grandfather ever superseded it. Years afterward, when, in an environment almost fantastically unlike that of his youth, he told his children of his own simple boyhood, and repeated to them tales of Zenas Wheelock's adventures, there would emerge out of the mists of memory that vivid semblance of his grandfather as he stood on the porch with the translucent green of leaves behind him, a noble old figure gazing into the future with a seer's eyes.

CHAPTER IV

THE changes prophesied by Zenas Wheelock as a result of Shire's visit to Oakland did not materialize that fall. True, the blue-and-yellow signboards of W. J. Shire & Co. became more numerous throughout the region, but they were hardly noticed save by the children who, considering themselves proprietors of the vacant lots, made free use of the signs for building material and bonfires.

Their elders were not thinking about real estate just then. The political campaign of 1884 was in full swing, and the fight, bitter and vituperative throughout the country, was particularly savage in Chicago, where, earlier that summer, both parties had held their national conventions.

Through the first months of the campaign the election of James G. Blaine was considered certain, but now, with the voting close at hand, the situation sharply changed. A New York minister, more al-literative than discreet, made a speech characterizing the Democratic Party as the party of "rum, Romanism, and rebellion," and the phrase proved to be a boomerang.

All over the city and the suburbs the struggle was intense. Performances of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," minstrel shows and concerts at the Republican Wigwam in Oakland, to which Zenas Wheelock had

occasionally taken his grandson earlier in the season, now gave place to rallies and fiery oratory, followed, at night, by torchlight processions. When the processions passed the Wheelocks' house, Miss Martha let Alan sit up late that he might see the marching columns with their bands, transparencies, and swaying flares. Usually Mrs. Holden and Blanche would come over to the Wheelocks' to watch the marchers pass; for Luke Holden now spent most of his evenings downtown, where it was understood he worked with the Democratic county committee.

Alan was taken one night to hear his grandfather speak at a rally in the Exposition Building, on the Lake Front, where he made a plea for the elimination of personal abuse from the campaign, declaring that the circulation of scandal concerning the private life of either candidate was a disgrace to the party which permitted it. He was applauded and cheered when he sat down; but next day the Democratic press took up his speech and featured it, using it as a text against the Republican Party, which had promulgated gross slanders against Cleveland.

To the delight of Martha Wheelock, who was afraid that her father would wear himself out, this episode resulted in a cessation of speaking invitations. Zenas Wheelock, the campaign managers decided, was too frank to be safe. But the old man was a figure so well known in the city and so long identified with the Republican Party, that the need of him was felt, and when, in the latter part of October, a great Republican parade was being organized, he was asked to lead a section composed of old voters.

In the days immediately preceding the parade, Joseph Medill's *Chicago Tribune*—a staunchly Republican journal which ranked on Zenas Wheelock's reading list between the Bible and the works of Voltaire—gave, each morning, news of larger plans, and declared that this was to be the greatest political demonstration of the kind ever seen in the city.

Mrs. Holden and Miss Wheelock were to take Blanche and Alan to see the procession, and Zenas Wheelock, on his way to the place where the line was to form, started downtown with them in the suburban train, wearing, as if it had been Sunday, his Prince Albert coat and tall silk hat.

Alan observed with pride that people in the train admired his grandfather.

"Marching to-day, Mr. Wheelock?" asked the amiable conductor, as he punched the ticket; and when, presently, Mr. Perkins, the tall bearded popcorn man, came through the train, wearing his gray stovepipe hat, carrying his striped sack over his shoulder, and announcing in his nasal voice, "Butter-r, salt, or sugar-r-r," he too paused and spoke of politics.

Zenas Wheelock bought bags of popcorn for Blanche and Alan, and while Mr. Perkins stood and chatted the two children gazed up at him in silent awe; for Mr. Perkins, with his height, his wonderful hat, and his inexhaustible supply of popcorn, was in the eyes of every child who travelled on these suburban trains an eminent personage, and though gracious, as the truly great must ever be, did not lack a fitting sense of his own worth, and

seldom unbent to the point of conversing with a customer.

When the train reached Van Buren Street station the two ladies and their charges parted from Zenas Wheelock and made their way to the office of Miss Martha's cousin, Mr. Brackett, whence they were to watch the marchers pass. Mr. Brackett was taking part in the parade and was not there to welcome them, but his wife, Cousin Emma, presently arrived and sat chatting with the ladies while Cousin Henry's bookkeeper, an elderly man with sparse gray hair and gentle eyes, entertained the children by letting them make impressions with his rubber stamps, and showing them how, with the aid of a damp cloth and an iron press, he copied Cousin Henry's business letters in a book having tissue-paper leaves. Thus time passed quickly until the sound of a brass band, in the distance, drew them to the window.

With adult hands firmly grasping the back of their clothing, Alan and Blanche leaned out upon the sooty window sill and watched the head of the parade approach with its waving banners and resounding band. The marshal, with a wide ribbon over his shoulder and across his breast, was mounted on a glossy chestnut which arched its neck proudly and pranced sidewise up the centre of the street.

"Oh, look at that lovely horse!" cried Blanche.

Alan turned his head and closely regarded her as, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, she gazed at the handsome animal. Looking at her thus, he was aware of a great astonishment. His memories of her were as old as any memories he had, yet he felt,

at this instant, as if he were seeing her for the first time. Suddenly, inexplicably, she had become new to him with a newness the more sweet because, in truth, she was not new to him at all.

Gripped by a quick embarrassment, he turned away and watched the caracoling horse. Some day he meant to have a horse like that. He would gallop up to Blanche's house and she would come down and pat the horse. She would be afraid of it, but he would reassure her. They would ride together. Looking with vacant eyes at the marching men below, he was in the midst of a romantic vision in which Blanche's horse had run away with her, and he had caught it, saving her life, when she brought him back to the present, calling his attention to a band, larger than any they had seen, which was swinging toward them at a distance of a block or two.

"That's the First Regiment Band," he told her.

"How can you tell, so far away?"

"Easy as pie. Don't you know about my cigarette pictures? I got the best collection of any boy in the Oakland School." Feeling that he was impressing her, he became expansive. "You know Bill Tinghey, that drives Clark's wagon? He smokes like a chimley and he gives me all the cigarette pictures he gets. Bill says he knows a barber down on Thirty-first Street that would give a dollar and a quarter for my collection. There's a hundred and thirty-two different National Guard uniforms and I——"

"Oh, look, look!" Blanche had turned away and was gazing at the band as it briskly advanced to the

tune of "Marching Through Georgia." Her exclamation was occasioned by the drum major, who suddenly sent his baton spinning to the height of the second-story windows, and without changing his jaunty step, recaptured it as it fell.

"Isn't he wonderful!" She pointed, and with the other hand clutched Alan by the arm.

Alan had been admiring the drum major, who, in his big white busby, was a gorgeous being, but now, suddenly, he found him irritating. Stuck on himself! A good joke if he'd drop his stick and it would go bouncing all over the street and he'd have to go running after it with everybody laughing at him. Just because a man could spin a stick was no particular reason for a girl to get excited.

"Where's your manners, anyway?" he demanded sternly of Blanche. "Poking out your hand and pointing at people like that! The idea!"

She turned to him, a startled look in her big hazel eyes, and drawing back her hand, covered it with the other and held it close to her.

"I was only fooling," he told her, seized by a sharp contrition. Hastily extracting from his pocket the crumpled paper bag, he offered her the remainder of his popcorn, but she shook her head.

The music of the advancing band, resounding against the buildings across the way, came to a crashing climax and suddenly ceased, and there followed what, by contrast, seemed to be a deep silence, through which dimly emerged the even beat of snare drums and the steady shuffle of marching feet.

Miss Martha, with one hand on Alan's coat, had

remained in the corner of the window gazing down the street.

"Here comes Father!" she exclaimed.

"Where, where?"

"Behind the band—leading the next section."

The band was now under the window marching to the beat of drums; to the rear several men were carrying a banner, bearing the words "OLD VOTERS' SECTION," and behind them, greeted by a ripple of applause from the crowd, Zenas Wheelock strode with an elastic tread down the middle of the street.

"How old is your father, now, Martha?" inquired Cousin Emma Brackett.

"Seventy-four."

"Is he going to march the whole six miles?" Her tone sounded slightly critical.

Martha nodded.

"Well, I should think it would worry you."

"It does," said Martha gravely, "but it seems to me there's just one way to make a person happy, and that's to let him be happy in the way *he* wants."

As the old man passed under the window, Alan was unable to see his face, but even so, he felt he would have known him by his carriage and by the square toes of his boots.

"Isn't he going to see us?" Blanche anxiously demanded, and without waiting for an answer she cried shrilly:

"Grampa Wheelock! Grampa Wheelock!"

"Gee, but you can holler!" Alan drew away from her but he spoke admiringly.

"Grampa *Whee*-lock!" she shrieked again, and

this time the old man evidently heard her, for he looked up and waved his hand.

For Martha Wheelock the procession was over, but Cousin Emma was on the lookout for her husband, and the children still found much to interest them.

The Old Voters' Section was divided into groups, each led by a banner proclaiming the name of the President for whom the members of the group had cast their first ballots. The foremost banner bore the legend, "VOTED FOR JAMES MONROE—1816" and behind it, solitary on the back seat of a barouche, sat a little withered leaf of a man. Next came three old citizens who had voted for John Quincy Adams in 1824, but those riding behind the banners of William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor were more numerous, and the Lincoln men, who brought up the rear, were hundreds strong. Still in the prime of life, they did not ride in carriages, like those ahead of them, but marched as veterans, in even, military ranks.

The section having passed, another band came by, leading a marching club. Cousin Emma was sure her husband was among the members of this club, but as each carried a red-white-and-blue umbrella, she had no way of identifying him.

More bands. More marching clubs. Transparencies. A horsedrawn float, on which Columbia, impersonated by a young woman in white draperies and a gilt paper crown, endeavoured unsuccessfully to look serene upon a throne that rocked with every rut in the uneven pavement. Another band. A

glee club, singing as it marched. More marching clubs. More bands, but not such good ones as had passed at first.

The children, growing restless, ceased to lean upon the window sill. Alan stood up and stretched himself, and Blanche looked ruefully at the red marks beneath the sooty smudges on her forearms. Down the street, as far as the eye could reach, the procession was still coming, but they had seen enough, and they were glad when presently their guardians decided it was time to start for home.

The sun was low in the west; the crowd at the edge of the sidewalk was thinning out, and as the four rounded a corner and started toward Wabash Avenue, they became part of a vast homebound throng. Blanche, clinging to her mother's hand, walked ahead, but when Miss Martha offered her hand to Alan, he refused it.

"No, thanks, Auntie. I'm all right. I'm perfectly——" Catching sight of Mr. Holden coming out of the side entrance of the Palmer House, he stopped short.

"Why, there's Pappa!" exclaimed Blanche; whereupon her father, who, on seeing them, had made as if to reënter the building, advanced to meet them, while the pretty young lady at his side hastily dropped his arm and offered her hand to Mrs. Holden.

"Oh, how do you do!" she said cordially. "I suppose you've had your little girl down to see the procession?"

"Yes. How do you do, Miss Shire?"

"Miss Shire and I just chanced to meet in the

lobby," Holden put in. "We thought we'd go over and have a look at the procession, if it's still going on."

"It is," answered his wife, and introduced Miss Shire to Martha Wheelock.

"What a perfectly lovely child!" exclaimed Miss Shire, smiling down at Blanche. "She has such big eyes, and the colour of them's so unusual." She placed her hand on Blanche's shoulder and bent over her. "Did you enjoy the parade, dearie?"

Blanche nodded.

"Answer Miss Shire," instructed her father.

"Yes'm."

The pause which followed was broken by Miss Shire.

"I know what would be nice!" she exclaimed, looking brightly at Blanche. "Your father didn't want to take me to the procession anyway, so let's all go and have some ice cream, instead."

"Strawberry!" cried Blanche, but her mother intervened.

"Thank you," she said, "but we must be getting the children home to supper." She glanced for support to Martha Wheelock, who promptly assented.

"Well," said Miss Shire, "I'm awfully glad that we chanced to meet. Mamma and I *so* enjoyed having supper at your house, and we were terribly disappointed that you couldn't join us at the races. We had quite a lucky day, too. That's another reason we want Pappa to move to Oakland: it's so much handier to Washington Park track."

She turned to Miss Wheelock.

"We live on the West Side, you know, and it's a long drive. If we move to Oakland, I'm going to have a season ticket to the races."

Again there came a pause.

"There can't be much more of the procession," Miss Shire said to Holden, "I really ought to be going home."

He glanced at his watch. "All right. I didn't realize how late it was. As a matter of fact, I should be at Headquarters this minute."

The group broke up. Mrs. Holden and Miss Wheelock, resuming their way eastward with the children, were silent, and it was not until they had crossed Michigan Avenue and begun to traverse the cinder path leading toward the little wooden station at the outer edge of the Lake Front, that Miss Wheelock spoke.

"Oh," she said as if a sudden thought had come to her, "I've been meaning to ask you, Nannie—have you heard a rumour that the Morrison lot has been sold?"

"Why, no."

"The Morrison lot's where I found my Indian arrowhead," Alan put in.

"Yes," said his aunt, "I know."

"It's where us boys have our cave."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, nobody's going to build a house there, are they?"

"I don't know. Anyway you've had lots of fun making your cave. Making things is the most fun of all, though people don't always realize it."

Alan reflected on the statement. It was true that since the cave was finished, the boys hadn't used it very much.

"Did you hear who it was that bought it?" Mrs. Holden inquired.

"Yes, I heard Mr. Shire was going to build there—that 'mansion' he spoke of, I suppose."

"Miss Shire didn't seem to know about it."

"No, that's what made me wonder."

"Where did you hear it?"

"Harris mentioned it," returned Miss Wheelock, but she did not add that her brother had quoted Luke Holden as his authority.

CHAPTER V

FOLLOWING closely upon the news of Shire's purchase of the Morrison lot came a period of nearly two weeks' anxious waiting during which the *Tribune* refused to concede that Cleveland was elected to the Presidency; but on November 16th, Zenas Wheelock, taking up his Sunday paper, read the fateful headline "Grover Gets There." His feelings concerning the election, and concerning Shire, were, the family realized, profound; but they refrained from condoling with him, even Alan, young as he was, understanding that it was not in his grandfather's nature to discuss his disappointments. Particularly when Luke Holden was present, the old man avoided both topics, and in this policy Luke tacitly joined. Each understood the views of the other on politics, and on the question of Oakland real-estate development, and it is not impossible that each sensed the attitude of the other toward members of the Shire family.

However, they did not often meet, for though the gate in the fence between the Wheelock and the Holden yards continued to swing to and fro, Luke Holden's visits to the Wheelock house were now less frequent. While the political fight was raging, he had formed the habit of dining downtown several nights a week, and when the campaign ended, he

continued the practice, often reaching home very late, and once alarming his wife by failing to appear at all.

"I wish you'd send a messenger when you're not coming," she told him the next day.

"There'd be no sense in that. It would only get you up in the middle of the night."

As it was, she had lain awake all night, but she could never argue.

She was increasingly disturbed about him. His appetite was poor; he looked tired, and his manner was abstracted. It had never been his custom to discuss his affairs with her and he seemed now to think that a vague mention of pressing business sufficiently explained his absences. Once she ventured to ask him if he had met with business difficulties, and received in reply a monosyllabic assurance that he had not, but generally she feared to question him, having learned soon after marriage that he was irritable and sarcastic.

Nannie Holden was peculiarly unable to cope with harshness. She dreaded the cold, critical expression that came into his eyes when she displeased him, and the sharp-edged smile that preceded words which coiled around her like a whip lash. The smile was disarming, but not in the sense in which a smile is usually disarming. By making a pretense of humour where there was no humour, it betrayed her.

One evening, when he had sat through supper hardly speaking, she risked his displeasure.

"I'm afraid you're wearing yourself out, Luke," she began.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, let me alone!" As he rose from the table and strode nervously out of the room, Blanche looked up with startled eyes, and later, when Nannie was putting her to bed, she knew from the child's embrace that she was sorry for her.

The season of sitting on porches came to an end; screens were removed from doors and windows; hammocks were taken down and put away; honeysuckle, dry and brown on the trellises, rustled under crisp breezes that stripped the trees and sent withered leaves whirling over the grass in a dance of death that ended in the incense of autumnal pyres. Early evening bonfires glared and crackled in the vacant lots, silhouetting the figures of children, who danced around them while potatoes were baking in the embers. Colonel Burchard and his family, returning from their long stay in the East, had guests who arrived barely in time to see the last cold trickle dripping from the iron umbrella held by the metallic children of the fountain; that day the water was shut off, and the much-admired object took on a winter covering of straw and wood resembling a pair of huge packing boxes piled one upon the other.

On the evening of their homecoming the Burchards brought their visitors to the Wheelocks' house, and the Holdens also came over.

While the men talked in the library, carefully avoiding the expression of political opinions which might offend Luke Holden, the ladies sat in the parlour, a larger and more formal room, chatting about styles. Mrs. Burchard's guest, a woman of

fashion, lived in New York and had lately returned from Paris. Rumours that bustles would be smaller next season were not to be credited, she told them; muffs would be tiny and round, and for hats the "Eugénie droop" was as popular as ever. The prettiest bonnets she saw abroad were trimmed with ostrich feathers and had roses under the brim, just above the bang; they were worn well back upon the head and tied beneath the left ear. The most stylish evening gowns were sleeveless, with white gloves reaching well above the elbows; the bodice was a basque, cut to a deep V, front and back, trailing off into a long train with butterfly bows on the bustle, and the skirt would show row upon row of lace flounces. With such a costume curls might be worn attached to the back hair.

Styles having been thoroughly discussed, the lady was led to the square rosewood piano, where, in a light soprano voice she sang, in English, several songs of Verdi and Bellini, which brought the children to the room. For them she sang a humorous song which she said was becoming very popular. It was about a miner who lived in a cabin with his daughter, whose name was Clementine, and you'd almost think it was a serious song until funny words popped in. When Clementine "fell into the foaming brine" and was drowned, all the chorus said about it was:

"Oh, my darling, oh, my darling,
Oh, my darling Clementine,
You are lost and gone for ever,
Dreffful sorry, Clementine!"

The lady knew many songs, and when she played
"Only a Pansy Blossom," they joined in the chorus:

"Only a pansy blossom,
Only a faded flower,
Yet to me the fairest
In all this earth's fair bower. . . ."

After a while Colonel Burchard came in, announcing: "Major Wheelock is going to tell us some of his stories." The Colonel, who had first met Zenas Wheelock on the battlefield of Shiloh, always gave him his military title, and was adept at leading him into reminiscence.

The ladies now moved to the library, joining the gentlemen in a wide circle around the grate, where a fire of cannel coal was burning, but Alan and Blanche took their cider and doughnuts to a corner, hoping no one would think about its being bedtime.

Seated in his armchair at the centre of the group the old man gazed into the fire as he talked of the fur trade and the rivalry between the representatives of different companies, which often resulted in the giving of liquor to the Indians. He told of the Indian to whom he had refused whisky; how the savage, determined to obtain it, crept up behind him as he sat on a bench by the door of his trading post on the Spoon River; how, seeing the shadow of the tomahawk just as it fell, he dodged, and instead of receiving it upon the head, caught a paralyzing blow upon the arm. They grappled. He threw the Indian to the ground and lay upon him, strangling him with

one hand until the strength came back into the injured arm, when he finished the job.

Next Colonel Burchard led him to tales of winter in the woods: his first efforts to travel on snowshoes along with seasoned trappers, resulting in the painful *mal de raquette*, which caused his feet and legs to swell so that he could hardly bear to remove the cloth "neips." Lost in the white wilderness, facing death by freezing, he was rescued by an Indian boy who dragged him on a rude sledge to a tepee where a squaw took care of him, saving his life.

Then the story of his solitary vigil in a log cabin by a frozen lake. Alan always wondered why, though there were no fights in that story, it so fascinated him. His grandfather had expected to be alone for several days, but the party that had gone inland to trade with the Indians didn't come back for a month. Meanwhile, he had no news of them. Had they frozen to death or been murdered? It was a long, straining wait with nothing but parched corn to eat and the snow so deep that a hungry wolf was the only animal abroad. Before the month was over, Zenas Wheelock discovered a way to decoy lake trout and spear them through a hole in the ice. Instead of shooting the wolf which came each night for the bits of fish he threw outside the cabin door, he would sit up listening for its howl—the only sound he heard from a living creature. When at last the men returned, he wept for joy.

And there was the story of the Indian bully. It was Zenas Wheelock's first year in the wilderness;

he was seventeen years old, and the traders, going ashore to barter with the savages, left him with young Dufour in charge of a canoe. Seeing the two youths alone, an Indian came and tried to frighten them, saying he had fought on the side of the British in the War of 1812, and that the scalps at his belt were American scalps. In describing the episode, Zenas Wheelock admitted that he had trembled with fear. The Indian warrior, perceiving this, dipped one of the scalps in the stream and flicked the long wet hair in the boy's face, whereat his terror turned to rage. Snatching a gun from the bottom of the canoe he levelled it at his tormentor and fired. Fortunately, however, Dufour thought quickly; with a blow from his paddle he struck up the barrel and the shot was discharged harmlessly into the air. Had he not done so, the Indian would certainly have been killed, and probably his friends would have murdered the entire trading party.

At the sound of the shot the others came running up, and the Indian chief, on hearing the story, was pleased with the courage of "the young white brave," and adopted him. This chief remained throughout his life Zenas Wheelock's staunch friend, and there was a funny story about his coming, years afterward, to pay a visit to his adopted son, then a prosperous Chicago business man. As the chief brought with him seven members of his family, the matter presented something of a problem to Alan's grandmother; but to her great relief the guests, without a moment's hesitation, took up their quarters in the

woodshed, where they remained for two weeks as honoured visitors, having, in Zenas Wheelock's phrase, "a high old time."

The stories had, for Alan, the charm of familiarity, and to-night there had been little added touches, for the old man liked his audience and was enjoying himself. "But there was one item, that Alan missed.

"You forgot something, Grampa," he said.

"What?" inquired his grandfather.

"When you choked the Indian, his face got black and his tongue stuck out," said Alan with as much assurance as if he had been an actual witness of the scene.

"Those," returned the old man with a smile, "are details I mention only when I'm telling the story to boys."

"When the Indians came to visit you that time," Alan asked, "was it when you lived in your big house in Napier Place?"

"Gracious, Martha," exclaimed Mrs. Holden, rising quickly, "the children have been so quiet I forgot all about them! It's long past Blanche's bedtime." And to Blanche: "Come, dear."

There was a little flurry in the room as good-nights were said, and Alan's question went unanswered.

CHAPTER VI

THAT winter Alan and Blanche were sent to dancing school. The class, starting in November, met in the Oakland Rifles Armoury, and thenceforth Alan, instead of being free to spend his Saturday afternoons at play, must needs put on his Sunday suit and a painful collar and, carrying his patent-leather pumps, repair to the detested hall.

Miss Lightner, mistress of the class, a middle-aged woman with a generous figure, wore lacy dresses and very full skirts, which she would lift daintily, holding them with thumb and forefinger, while showing the children how to point their toes. She explained about Delsarte, and illustrated by walking on the balls of her feet with a springy step which she invited the children to imitate. The girls seemed to like dancing school and got along fairly well, but not so the boys. Miss Lightner found it necessary to give them special attention, lining them up before her, making them follow her steps, urging them, the while, to be graceful.

The polka, schottische, and waltz were the dances taught, and as soon as the pupils knew the steps, they danced in couples, Miss Lightner herding the reluctant boys over to the side of the room on which the girls sat in line. But you couldn't just say, "Come on," and start to dance. You had to bow in

a certain way. You were supposed to put your right hand over your heart and bend at the waist, allowing the left arm to dangle like a rope. "Miss Holden," you must say, "may I have the pleasure of this dance?" Whereat Miss Holden would rise, pick up her skirts, and make a deep curtsy. All this, Miss Lightner insisted, must be executed in a stately manner. *Stately!* Outside the dancing school the word came into derisive use among the boys.

The dancing seemed to Alan bad enough without the bowing. To be compelled to stand in line and watch Miss Lightner illustrating grace and stateliness made him inwardly writhe; the elaborate curtseys of the girls struck him as ridiculous contortions, and to be himself compelled to bow in this exaggerated manner was revolting. He longed to run amok, breaking things, terrifying Miss Lightner, but indulged the rebellious impulse only to the extent of bowing as awkwardly as possible, placing his hand not upon his heart, but upon what he described in whispers as his liver, grimacing as he pronounced the abhorrent formula, and when permitted to return to his seat, taking a run, sliding over the waxed floor, and crashing his chair against the wall.

In mid-December a new boy joined Miss Lightner's class. Ray Norcross, Colonel Burchard's grandson, came with his mother to spend the Christmas holidays with the Burchards, and though he already knew how to dance, the class provided a means by which he could meet the children of the neighbourhood.

Oakland had never before seen a boy like Ray. He lived in New York, had travelled abroad, wore an Eton suit, and could execute steps unknown even to Miss Lightner. His paternal grandmother was Spanish, and from her he had inherited an olive skin, brilliant dark eyes, and glossy hair which he had a way of throwing back with a spirited toss of the head. When, at dancing class, he walked over to a girl, bowed, and asked her for the pleasure of a dance, he did not seem ridiculous even to the other boys, who, almost as much as the girls, were impressed by his easy, gracious bearing.

Obviously there was no one so well fitted to lead Miss Lightner's Christmas cotillion, and Ray did lead it, selecting Blanche Holden as his partner. Later he accepted lightly the congratulations which were showered upon him; and as the boys, in the cloak-room, changed to their street shoes, he told of the elaborate favours given at a cotillion he had attended in New York.

It was dusk when Ray, accompanied by Alan and several of the other boys, left the armoury. A little way ahead of them, Blanche and Marie Hayes, moving homeward, were silhouetted darkly against the new fallen snow. Ray bent over, picked up a handful of snow and packed it into a ball.

"Hey, Blanche, what's your hurry?" he called.

The two girls turned, and as they did so, Ray threw the snowball. It struck Blanche on the shoulder. He laughed and snatched up another handful of snow.

"Stop!" cried Marie, but Ray, in a shrill falsetto,

mocked her, and, flinging his missile, dived for more snow; whereupon the two girls broke into a run.

"Let's catch 'em and wash their faces!" With a whoop Ray started after them, but the other boys did not follow, and he came back.

"I'll get a licking if I tease Marie any more," said Grant, her brother, by way of explanation.

Ray's action left Alan dumbfounded. He had felt sure that Ray liked Blanche a lot. Everybody thought so. If he didn't like her, why had he danced with her so much and picked her out to lead the cotillion with him? Blanche was a good dancer, but she wasn't the only one. Watching them together that afternoon, aware of his own clumsiness, he had felt, every now and then, an uncomfortable ripple passing up his spine, like when you're catching cold. It reminded him of the way he felt that day at the parade when she pointed at the drum major, only this time it was worse and kept up longer. He loathed the cotillion.

Still, if Ray liked Blanche, why did he want to snowball her and wash her face with snow? Maybe he didn't like her as much as they'd all supposed. Alan, trudging home, found the idea comforting.

But at the Christmas party which Colonel and Mrs. Burchard gave for Ray, the young host singled Blanche out as he had at dancing school. She sat with him on a painted iron seat in the conservatory when the ice cream and cake were served, and when forfeits was played Alan saw her kneel, blushing, on the sofa cushion to receive Ray's kiss. Again he felt that sickening ripple up his spine.

With his refreshments he retired to a corner, and turning his back on the festivities divided his attention between his ice cream and a painting which hung on the wall, near by. It was a small canvas, showing a gentleman in a powdered wig and satin breeches kneeling in an attitude of supplication before a beautiful lady who looked pensively away from him. Affixed to the gold frame was a brass plate giving the name of the picture. Unrequited Love, it was called, but the title was unnecessary, for the painting told its own story.

Noticing Alan's aloofness, Mrs. Norcross, Ray's mother, moved across the room and engaged him in conversation.

"Do you like pictures?" she asked.

"Yes'm." He continued to stare at the painting.

"Come and look at the others," she invited. Alan put down his empty plate, and together they moved about the room, inspecting the various canvases: tarantella dancers in bright-coloured costumes; a cottage with a light in the window; a stag by a woodland pool; German soldiers marching through a battered village; a peaceful river scene with fernlike trees covering the mountain-sides, which Mrs. Norcross said was a view of the Hudson River.

"You can see the Hudson from New York City, can't you?" Alan inquired.

"Yes."

"Did you leave Mr. Norcross back in New York?"

She nodded, saying, "He couldn't leave his work."

"I bet he misses you."

It struck Mrs. Norcross that this remark showed unusual thoughtfulness in a boy of Alan's years.

"And we miss him," she answered.

"I guess you'll be going home pretty soon, then?"

"Next Tuesday."

"You and Ray?"

"Ray tells me he would like to stay a little longer."

"Would you let a boy of Ray's age go home on the train alone, Mrs. Norcross?" Alan looked up at her so gravely that she hesitated, saying:

"I haven't quite made up my mind."

"Well, I wouldn't let him if I was you," said Alan.

"You take the way boys are always flipping on and off trains and getting their legs cut off. Why, just the other day there was a fellow got his leg cut off near Oakland station. I saw them take him to the hospital in the patrol wagon, and there was blood all over the tracks."

A pained expression crossed the lady's face; she drew in her breath sharply and, obviously with the purpose of changing the subject, took up a reading glass which Colonel Burchard kept on a table near the picture of *Unrequited Love*, and handed it to Alan, calling his attention to the careful manner in which the artist had painted the sheen of satin and the pattern of lace. But when Alan raised the glass, it was to gaze, not at these details, but at the sorrowful faces of the lady and the gentleman. Sad as it was, he thought this picture more beautiful than any he had ever seen.

"Would you like to be a painter?" Mrs. Norcross asked, struck by his show of interest.

"Yes'm."

At first she had thought him a moody and difficult boy, but now she believed she understood him better. "He has the artistic temperament," she told herself, and the artistic temperament was something she fancied she understood, she was wont to declare with a certain pride. Her architect-husband inherited the artistic temperament of his Spanish mother, and she believed that Ray possessed it in even greater degree.

"That's very interesting," she said. "Perhaps Ray has told you that he thinks of becoming a painter, too?" And when Alan shook his head, she continued: "He hasn't made up his mind yet whether he wants to be a painter or a writer. He draws very nicely and has real poetic feeling. You and he should be great friends."

"Yes'm," said Alan.

CHAPTER VII

WHETHER because of apprehension sown in her mind by Alan, or for some other reason, Mrs. Norcross took Ray with her when she left for home. To the children of the neighbourhood his visit had been like the visit of a comet. An exotic, brilliant object, he flashed into their sky, dazzled them for a little time, and disappeared.

But he was not forgotten. Particularly in the minds of the girls, he remained a figure symbolizing all that was romantic. To live in New York was wonderful enough; but even New York, it seemed, wasn't sufficiently big to hold Ray. A letter to Blanche, arriving in March, came from Egypt. He had seen the Sphinx, climbed the Pyramids with an Arab, ridden a camel over the desert, and was about to go up the Nile. The letter came one cold, rainy morning as Blanche, in her waterproof, was starting for school. She had time to read only part of it before leaving the house, but took it with her and finished the reading surreptitiously in study hour. Ray said he was going to Sicily later. She looked up Sicily in her geography. On the map it showed as a green island near the toe of Italy's boot, and one of the many woodcuts with which the book was illustrated depicted a Sicilian scene, with peasants in pictur-

esque costumes standing under olive trees, and smoke-plumed Ætna in the distance.

Outside, the storm continued; bursts of wind, sweeping intermittently from the lake, rattled the schoolroom windows and drove the rain against them in a roaring torrent.

Egypt! Sicily!

On the blue-lined paper intended for arithmetic Blanche began a letter.

Her desk was at the back of the room, near one of the tall windows, and as she wrote, she was dimly aware of unusual darkness. Presently she heard Miss Claypool telling Wally Archer, the monitor, to light the gas, but she did not look up from her letter to watch him reaching for the chandelier with the long gas-lighter.

"What's this, Blanche?" Miss Claypool's crisp voice, coming from behind her, broke startlingly upon her consciousness, and simultaneously the paper was snatched from beneath her pen.

Reading the letter as she moved between the rows of desks, Miss Claypool went to the platform.

"Well, well!" she said sarcastically. "A very original arithmetic paper! Listen to this, children." The class looked up and she read aloud:

"Dear Ray:

"I am in school and it is raining, so I was very glad to hear from you. How wonderful about you riding on a camel and going in a boat on the Nile! There is a picture of Sicily in my geography, and I wish I was going there too. You must be having a

wonderful time. Yes, I miss you as much as you miss me, and——”

Here the reading was interrupted by sniggering from the children, who had turned to stare at Blanche. Her face was flaming. Like the rest, Alan was looking at her, but he was not amused.

Ray! She and Ray were writing to each other and she hadn't said a thing about it! She'd better blush!

His own cheeks were hot, and he trembled with an indignation the more violent because his sense of her perfidy was unreasoning.

“I think,” said Miss Claypool, as the tittering died down, “that Blanche had better come to the platform and continue the reading.” She waited a moment.

“Come, Blanche.”

“Oh, no!” Blanche's voice was faint.

“Come!” insisted the teacher, holding out the letter.

Blanche rose, stared for an instant at Miss Claypool, dropped back into her seat and buried her face in her arms. There was no laughter from the children now; the room was silent; even Blanche made no sound.

When Alan saw that she was sobbing, his feeling sharply changed. Miss Claypool had no right to do this! He hated her for doing it, and longed to tell her so. Rebellion surged so strong in him that for a moment he felt capable of violence; but the gong for recess rang, and he had to go with the other children

to the yard. Blanche was no longer there when they returned, nor did she come back that afternoon.

When school let out, Alan hastened home and looked anxiously at the windows of the Holdens' house, but discovered no sign of her. He knew that in order to see her he had only to pass through the gate, walk into the Holdens' hall, and call her name. But what would he say then? What could he say? It was the kind of thing you couldn't talk about. He wished to see her, yet didn't wish to see her. He wanted to do something about it—just to show her. Wasn't there something he could give her that she'd like? He thought of his air rifle, but it was broken. His cigarette pictures? No, he had shown them to her after the parade last fall, and had gathered that girls weren't interested in such things. What then? An idea struck him. Bill Tinghey had spoken of a barber who might buy his collection. A dollar and a quarter, Bill had said last year—and now the collection was larger.

He went to the table drawer, took out the treasured pasteboards, and, sitting on the bed, inspected them. It was the best collection in the neighbourhood. Bill said he'd never seen a better collection. The more Alan considered the pictures, the more the thought of parting with them pained him.

It wouldn't be so bad to give up the actresses and the Flags of All Nations. Some of the actresses were pretty—Emily Rigl, Sadie Martinot, Marie Jansen, Alice Lignard and Verona Jarbeau—but he used them mostly for trading. He would trade two actresses for a good flag, and two flags for a middling

good Sweet Caporal soldier picture. The collection of soldiers was the one he really loved. Besides innumerable militia organizations, competing with one another in the brilliance of their uniforms, he had a complete set of regular army uniforms, from the full general, in cocked hat and yellow sash, down to the private of infantry, and an almost complete set of naval uniforms. But grandest of all were the soldiers of foreign armies: cuirassiers, uhlans, dragoons, gendarmes, chasseurs, grenadiers, zouaves, hussars and cossacks, and most superb of these, treasured even above the American General and Admiral, was the Prince of Wales in the red uniform of a Prussian hussar regiment, and Czar Alexander III, in green tunic and white fur cap, a general of the Russian Infantry.

"Oh, gosh!" he murmured in an access of emotion, but the moment of weakness passed. To look further at them was but to torture himself needlessly; he snapped the rubber bands around them, put them in his pocket, and resolutely headed for the Corners, reaching Clark's just in time to catch Bill Tinghey before he started to make some late deliveries. The barber's name, Bill said, was Schoen, and his shop was at Thirty-first Street near Cottage Grove Avenue. "Stick out for a dollar and a half," was his parting advice.

It was more than a mile's walk. Outside the door of the barber shop stood a painted wooden Indian; within was a cigar stand, and from behind a pair of faded green curtains at the back came the heavy odour of cheap tobacco and the click of billiard balls.

Both barbers were busy; Alan took a chair and waited until Mr. Schoen, having finished with his customer, looked at him, exclaiming, "Next!" whereupon he advanced and stated his errand.

Mr. Schoen was a short, thick man with a bald head, watery blue eyes, and gold-framed spectacles. On learning that Alan was not there to have his hair cut, he seemed disappointed, and though he looked over the cigarette pictures, his manner, as he did so, was not encouraging.

"My main kollegting," he explained, "iss bostage stambs. Cigarette bictures iss my side-line, see? How much you vand for dese?"

Alan hesitated. Now that he was actually talking to Mr. Schoen, a dollar and a half looked like a good deal of money. Mr. Schoen didn't exactly seem interested a dollar and a half's worth.

"How about a dollar and a quarter?" he ventured.

"Gott in Himmel, boy! Are you gone crazy?" Mr. Schoen looked angry, but the customer paused in putting on his coat, and grinned.

"Well," said Alan, "all I know is, Bill Tinghey says they're worth a dollar and a half." He felt himself flushing. "That's what I was going to ask, but I——"

"Den Bill's crazy, too," the barber broke in. "Crazy as a pedpug." Scowling, he thrust the pictures into Alan's hand as if to indicate that the discussion was closed, and moving to the cigar stand made change for the departing customer. Nor, when he returned to his red plush chair, did he so much as look at Alan, but taking up a razor, began gloomily to hone it.

"Well, then," said Alan, addressing Mr. Schoen's back, "how much *would* you give?" But apparently the barber did not hear him, and after waiting for a time, he repeated the question.

"Oh, I don' know as I vand 'em, anyhow," growled Mr. Schoen over his shoulder. Holding the razor toward the window, he squinted at it, and after feeling the edge with his thumb, resumed his honing.

"Wouldn't you pay me anything at *all* for them?"

After what seemed to Alan a long pause, the barber spoke. "I giff you a coubla haircuts, mebbe," he replied indifferently.

"But lookit, Mr. Schoen, I need the money."

"You neet a haircut, too," returned the barber, regarding him with a professional eye.

But Alan knew now what he did not know when he entered the shop: he knew his irreducible minimum.

"Mr. Schoen," he said desperately, "I *got* to have fifty cents!"

The barber, however, made no answer, and Alan reluctantly put the pictures into his pocket and turned to go. His eyes had become moist with emotion; he hoped Mr. Schoen didn't think that he was crying.

"Vait a minnid." Mr. Schoen's voice stopped him at the door. "Must you get dot money so quick dot you can't vait a minnid? Led me see dose bictures some more." He laid down his razor, and taking the cigarette pictures to the cigar stand, looked them over again, while Alan, gazing up at him, waited anxiously.

"Vell," he said, "if you gotta haf so much as fifty

cends, why, den you gotta haf it, even if you rob me, eh?" He opened the cash drawer, took out two quarters, and placed them in Alan's hand.

"Ant now," he declared magnanimously, "I gif you a haircut free."

But Alan was already at the door. "I got to hurry," he said, and leaving the barber shop he headed for the little jewellery store at the Corners.

On learning how much money Alan had to spend, Mr. Lay, the jeweller, made an excellent suggestion. There was but one drawback. Time was required for engraving, and it was not until three days later that the present for Blanche was ready.

It was a "friendship ring" consisting of the rim of a dime to which was attached a heart-shaped bangle, bearing on one side Blanche's initials and on the other, Alan's. The price, including the engraving, was exactly fifty cents, and Mr. Lay contributed a tiny pasteboard box, the white velvet lining of which set off the lovely trinket to advantage.

With the box in his pocket Alan started homeward, but as he neared the Holden house he became increasingly uneasy. He had waited impatiently for the ring, but now that he had it he began to think of things which had not occurred to him before. Presents were generally given for some special reason, and this wasn't Christmas, or even Blanche's birthday. She'd wonder about it. If she asked, what would he tell her? He'd have to make some explanation.

His steps lagged. Instead of entering the Holdens'

gate, he passed on to his own house, and going to his room, closed the door, drew out the friendship ring and thoughtfully inspected it.

If she wore the ring, people would inquire about it. Aunt Nannie would be sure to notice it, and probably Aunt Martha, too. Worst of all, Mr. Holden. He'd hate to have Mr. Holden ask about it.

Replacing the ring in the box, he put it in the top drawer of the black walnut bureau, and moving to the window, sat down and opened his Higginson's History, but when his eyes reached the bottom of the page he didn't know what he had read.

That evening Mr. Holden stayed downtown; Aunt Nannie and Blanche came over for supper, and afterward, in the library, the children played parchesi while the grown-ups talked, their conversation turning to recent real-estate developments in Oakland. A lot diagonally opposite the Wheelocks' had been sold some two months earlier, and it had been understood that the purchaser, a Mr. Steinberg, intended to erect a handsome house. Excavations lately started, however, revealed the fact that two houses, instead of one, were to be built upon the property, Mr. Steinberg having sold half his lot to a Mr. Murphy. Because of the width of the lot, the new houses had to stand close together, but this, in the eyes of the average householder, was a trifling matter by comparison with the satisfying news that Mr. Murphy had paid almost as much for his half as Mr. Steinberg had paid for the entire property. Oakland had started to boom, and Zenas Wheelock seemed to be the only person in the neighbourhood who was not pleased.

"The crowding's begun," Alan heard him declare in a gloomy tone.

Having caught the words, his thoughts wandered off again, but not to the parchesi game. As he rattled the dice, he was thinking of the friendship ring in his bureau drawer upstairs. He must find some way of giving it to Blanche to-night. Probably he could manage it when she and Aunt Nannie went home. He would walk along with them. In the dark it would be easy to let Aunt Nannie get a little way ahead, and that would enable him to give the little box to Blanche. He wouldn't say much, but he must say enough to make things plain.

In his mind he began to formulate the speech.

"I thought it was awfully mean of Miss Claypool to read your letter. I know it isn't Christmas, or your birthday, or anything like that, but I wanted to get you something just to show you——" But there he stuck. To show her what? What was it that he meant the friendship ring to show her? Having turned the matter over in his mind he tried to think of words to express his feeling: "I wanted to get you something just to show you that I like you—that I like you very much."

He was still struggling with the phrasing of this declaration when Aunt Nannie rose to take Blanche home. The ring was upstairs. He darted to his room, snatched it from the drawer and descended again. They had gone, but he could hear their voices outside as they moved toward the gate, and he rushed after them.

"Oh, Blanche!" he called.

In the dimness ahead he saw her stop and wait for him. What was it he was going to say? What was it? He couldn't remember any of it—not a single word.

“Here!”

He thrust the box into her hand and fled.

CHAPTER VIII

BY MID-APRIL, when the foundations of the two new houses opposite the Wheelocks' were completed, news of several other sales of land passed pleasantly from lip to lip, rumoured prices mounting with each repetition. Residents of Oakland, hitherto somewhat humble when North Siders mentioned the Illinois Central, became less sensitive about the railroad tracks on the lake shore, and enthusiasts among them went so far as to declare that the North Side was jealous of the South Side's superior transportation.

The corner above the Wheelocks' had been bought by Mr. Pritchett, sometimes mentioned as the "bicycle king," and Alan, on his way to school one morning, noticed workmen on the Pritchett lot. But it was not until he returned in the afternoon that he became aware of a change in the aspect of the street. As he drew near, he saw that his grandfather was standing by the curb gazing at the lot, and simultaneously he discovered the nature of the change. Two giant oaks had been cut down. A team of draft horses, managed by a vociferous driver, was straining at one of the great stumps, now partially uprooted, and sections of trunk and gnarled gray limbs lay like the bodies of dead warriors on the ground.

Alan's first thought was that he and the other boys

were going to miss the oaks because they were the best trees in the neighbourhood to climb. Five years ago, when he was seven, he had fallen from one of them and broken his collarbone, and the episode had given him, somehow, a curious respect for that tree. Unlike the lindens and cherry trees in his grandfather's yard, and the young maples up and down the avenue, these oaks did not seem to grow; in their unchanging ruggedness, they might have been carved from stone. Yet now they were gone.

As he came up, his grandfather glanced at him and nodded, and suddenly Alan thought of the vanished grove and of Dufour, the gay young voyageur with whom Zenas Wheelock, as a boy of seventeen, first saw the prairie with the grass and wild-flowers waving in the wind.

Excavation on the Pritchett lot, progressing rapidly, revealed, a few days later, that instead of being separated from the sidewalk by a strip of grass, the side wall of the house would stand flush with the street; but this discovery, far from bringing the average householder to Zenas Wheelock's frame of mind, was welcomed as a sign of metropolitanism. The Pritchett house, Mr. Shire was reported to have said, would be the first in the neighbourhood to possess all the characteristics of a strictly city residence.

Shire himself, it was understood, would build that summer. The lot he owned was the largest in the region, and—gossip having prepared the neighbourhood for an Aladdin's palace—a ripple of excitement passed along the street when, one April morning, a

contractor's shanty and some teams appeared, and digging began. The excavation was truly enormous. At first it looked as if there were to be a sunken garden between the sidewalk and the house, but with the arrival of masons came the discovery that Shire's plans, though extensive, were of a nature highly practical. He was going to build a block.

There came presently a mild evening when for the first time that year the Wheelocks moved out to the porch after supper. Fresh green leaves were appearing on the honeysuckle vines, and the grass was losing its tawny winter colouring. Shrill cries echoed from across the street, where the walls of the Steinberg and Murphy houses were beginning to rise, providing entrancing playgrounds for boys who, after the workmen left at night, would filch boards, clamber down into the cellars, and scamper over the open joists. From a cherry tree in the back yard came the sleepy twilight chirp of a robin; then the sound of voices as the Holdens advanced around the corner of the house.

Though there was never a day when the Wheelocks did not see Nannie Holden and Blanche, Luke Holden's visits were few, and in spite of the avoidance of such delicate subjects as politics and real estate, the sense of strain was growing. To-night he brought a letter he had received from a friend in northwestern Canada, telling about the Riel Rebellion, and after he had read it aloud, the talk turned to the illness of General Grant and the memoirs he was writing.

The lamp-lighter zigzagged up the avenue touch-

ing the street lamps with his wand-like torch, and now from this house, now from that, came the voice of a parent calling a child from play. Martha Wheelock went to the porch railing and looked across the street.

"Alan!" She waited for a moment, and raising her voice, called again. In a little while he appeared and sat down by Blanche in their usual place on the bottom step by the lilac bushes. He was panting, not because he had come with special haste, but because he was at an age when boys, like young dogs, are always on the run.

A little later Colonel and Mrs. Burchard drifted over from across the way, and the Colonel, after lighting a cigar, spoke of the Shire block, condoling with Zenas Wheelock.

"I've been expecting something of the kind," the old man answered briefly.

Colonel Burchard turned to Luke. "I suppose it will annoy you more than anybody else, Holden—the side wall right opposite your north windows."

For an instant Luke seemed to hesitate.

"Oh," he answered, "there'll be plenty of room between my windows and that wall. I sha'n't mind it. On the contrary, I think it's going to be a good thing in winter, because that side of my house is hard to heat when there's a north wind."

"I'm delighted," returned the Colonel, "to know that you take such a philosophical view of the situation. Perhaps, after all, Major Wheelock and I feel a little more strongly than the facts justify."

"Frankly," said Holden, "I think you do. I

can't see why anybody should object. The best residence districts in New York are building up with blocks, and there are lots of blocks on our fashionable streets downtown."

"No elbow room, no privacy," put in Zenas Wheelock ruminatively; but Holden continued as if he had not heard him.

"After all," he declared, "it's Shire's land."

Martha Wheelock, thinking she caught a note of irritation in his tone, was about to change the subject, when Colonel Burchard spoke again.

"Yes," he said, "but there's such a thing as consideration for one's neighbours. This Shire, when he bought the lot, assured John Morrison that he meant to build a large detached house, and——"

"Maybe that's what he did plan at first," Holden broke in, "but that was last fall, and conditions change."

"Well," returned the Colonel, "Morrison told me that if he had known then what he knows now, he wouldn't have sold to Shire."

"Oh, it's easy enough for him to say that," said Holden cynically.

But to this Zenas Wheelock promptly objected.

"I've known John Morrison since 1834," he declared abruptly, "and his word cannot be questioned."

"If he was so particular," Holden retorted, "I should think he'd have put it in the deed, the same as you'd want to do if you sold your land in Napier Place."

To this Zenas Wheelock made no reply, and the

ensuing silence was punctuated by the sound of his fingers drumming on the arm of his chair.

"With a man like Shire," remarked Colonel Burchard, "it's evidently necessary to do that."

"What Shire may or may not have said, offhand, to Mr. Morrison hasn't much to do with it, as far as I can see," asserted Holden. "I think he's doing a perfectly legitimate thing. The land's growing more valuable, and a man has a right to make his frontage count. If it was to be a cheap block, I might see some ground for objection, but from what I can learn of his plans, the houses will be a credit to this neighbourhood."

"That's more than the Shires will be!" suddenly interjected Mrs. Burchard.

Martha Wheelock, feeling as if a bomb had been thrown, spoke up quickly:

"You know them?"

"I met the wife and daughter at Long Branch last summer."

"Miss Shire's a beautiful girl," hurriedly pursued Martha.

"The men seemed to think so." Mrs. Burchard's tone was withering. And she added: "In a few years she'll look like her mother."

Martha stood up.

"Let's go in," she said. "It seemed mild enough this afternoon, but I notice the evenings are still chilly. It's ages since I've heard you play, Nannie. Or perhaps we might have a rubber of whist?"

"Thanks," said Luke, rising, "but we'll be going

home. Come, Nannie." And with quick good-nights they were gone.

Alan went up to bed, and the others moved in to the library, a square room with arched doors and windows and a high ceiling set off by a heavy plaster moulding. Over the tall bookshelves, which occupied two walls and the recesses at either side of the fireplace, were steel engravings in black walnut frames—the battle between the *Constitution* and the *Guerrière*, in which Zenas Wheelock's uncle had taken part; Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, a portrait of Voltaire, and in the place of honour, above the black marble mantelpiece, a head of Abraham Lincoln surmounted by the crossed sabres of Zenas Wheelock and his son Lyman who fell with Custer.

In the glow of a green-shaded student lamp, Harris Wheelock was working at the library table, the baize top of which was all but concealed by piles of small lithographs, engravings, and unbound books. Absentmindedly he greeted the visitors, and Colonel Burchard moved over and stood behind him, watching as Harris skillfully mounted one of the engravings on a sheet of paper cut to the page-size of an unbound volume on the table.

"What book now?" he asked, as Harris, having put the pasted sheet between waxed papers, weighted it down with a heavy dictionary.

"Same old thing, sir. Grangerizing 'Pepys' Diary.' I've been at it for more than a year, and it'll be at least another year before it's ready for the binder."

"I wish," said the Colonel, "that I had some in-

terest that meant as much to me as your books do to you."

"How about croquet?" suggested Harris, looking up with his vague smile.

"Yes, but for winter."

"If I could afford it," said Harris, "I'd drop everything else and spend my whole time collecting firsts. I believe I could make money at it, too. I got an old 'Hudibras' for six dollars a few years ago, and a London dealer has just offered me ten pounds for it. Almost every first I have has gone up since I got it, and my Shakespeare folios are getting so valuable I hardly dare keep them in the house."

When the Burchards left, Zenas Wheelock, bare-headed, strolled across the road with them. Meanwhile, Martha waited, holding the front door open that he might be guided by the light from the gas lamp in the hall. Presently, wondering why he did not return, she looked out and saw him a shadowy figure, standing by the fence that separated their front yard from the Holdens' garden.

"Father!" she cried. "You oughtn't to be out there in the wind without your hat and coat."

Obediently he came in, and Martha, feeling that he was uneasy, watched him as, deliberately, he locked the front door for the night, and reaching up, turned out the gas.

"Don't forget to put out the lamp when you come to bed," he said to Harris, through the open library door.

At the foot of the stairs, he motioned Martha to precede him, and silently they ascended. By his

bedroom door they paused, and Martha, putting her hands upon his broad shoulders, reached up and kissed him on the cheek.

“Good-night, my dear.” He patted her arm, but instead of going immediately into his room, he stood for a moment looking at her gravely.

“Morrison took Shire’s word,” he said reflectively. “He didn’t make him put his agreement in writing, and when I sold that strip to Luke, I didn’t make him put his agreement in writing, either.”

CHAPTER IX

THROUGHOUT the summer the neighbourhood resounded with a symphony of work: the metallic clink of chisel on stone, the xylophone note of falling planks, and the syncopated beat of many hammers. As the walls of the Shire block arose—green stone in front and pallid brick to the rear—Zenas Wheelock, pausing on his walks, would eye the bulky pile with a gaze that reminded Alan of the way he looked at a hired man they used to have, when he discharged him for getting drunk and failing to milk the cow.

Until now, Oakland, without being aware of it, had been a highly standardized community. Though the city reached out to its borders, and the growing village of Hyde Park ran on for miles beyond, it had the spirit of a prosperous country town. Its inhabitants were God-fearing people—Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians—a generation or two removed from New England and five or six generations removed from Old England or Scotland. Each family owned the house in which it lived; its members knew intimately the members of other families roundabout, and the names of all were American names.

But in September, while painters and paper-hangers were still at work, and grading was in prog-

ress, the owners of the two new residences across the street arrived with their families and their belongings, the gray granite house becoming the domicile of an extensive family of Murphys, while the other, of red brick and brown sandstone, harboured a horde of dark-hued Steinbergs, soft of eye and of intonation. It is doubtful, however, whether any one stopped to think that with the advent of these families the old rule of tribal nomenclature was broken; and it is certain that when the irascible Mr. Murphy rushed out of his house one evening, and in strong language ordered Alan and several other children to stop running over his new lawn, neither he nor they realized that this driving of young suburban savages from erstwhile vacant lots, last fragments of the ancient Illinois prairie, was but a repetition in miniature of the historical drama of settlement which began, eighty years earlier, with the building of Fort Dearborn on the reed-grown bank of the Chicago River, and ended with the ousting of the Indians from Illinois.

From the point of view of the children who had grown up in Oakland, the young Murphys and young Steinbergs were a distant addition to the neighbourhood group. Jakie Steinberg, who was about Alan's age, had a nickel-plated bicycle as fine in every way as a man's size bicycle, and far superior to those of painted iron which the other boys rode. A gentle boy, he was generous about lending his wheel, and was, moreover, a fast runner and skilful at games. And Frank Murphy, though he had no astonishing possessions, quickly gained respect by other means.

Groups of ragged boys, known to Oakland children

by the generic term "Micks," coming from dingy, ungraded streets far to the west, frequently passed through the neighbourhood in summer on their way to and from the lake, where, because of the dangers of railroad and deep water, the carefully reared children of Oakland were not allowed to go. The Micks were as Goths and Vandals; for no known reason there existed between them and the boys of Oakland a perpetual feud, and it must be admitted that, upon the appearance of the Micks, Alan and his friends were in the habit of retreating, with as much dignity as they could show, to the nearest yard, from which point of vantage it was their custom to exchange epithets and stones with the intruders.

Against this timorous policy, Frank Murphy, who not only came of the same valorous race as the Micks themselves, but was the nephew of a captain of police, immediately revolted. Under his leadership, the boys ceased to retire on sight of the enemy; battles ensued; eyes were blacked and noses bloodied; and if the Oakland boys were not always victorious, the coming of cold weather and the consequent cessation of visits from the Micks found them at least a more united and self-respecting band.

Among adults of the block, the advent of the Steinbergs and the Murphys created problems of which the children were hardly aware. Miss Wheelock, Mrs. Holden, and other ladies, having put on their bonnets and camel's-hair shawls, firmly clasped their card-cases, and called at the new houses, readily perceived that the Steinbergs and the Murphys were not "as polished corners of the temple"; and when in

October Miss Lightner, in process of organizing her dancing class, was asked to enroll two Steinbergs and three Murphys, there was raised, for the first time in Oakland history, a question of caste.

Nor was the case of the Steinbergs and the Murphys the only one of the kind. By November, the Pritchett house and the five lesser houses of the Shire block—structures bearing to the owner's residence the relationship of a train of cars to a locomotive—were completed and occupied, creating a further social problem in the form of applications for the admission of three more children to the dancing class. Having called on the mothers of the children newly installed in the Shire block, the ladies of the district came to the conclusion that the three should be allowed to join, but the question of the Steinbergs and the Murphys was not so easily settled.

It was Martha Wheelock who fought their battles for them. That the Steinbergs and the Murphys were common she could not deny, but she was a born champion of the under dog. Whatever the parents might be, she argued, the children were much like other children; to accept some newcomers and reject others would be cruel. Her championing of their cause was effective, and they were all admitted.

One of the children living in the Shire block was Leta Purnell. Leta did not, to be sure, come, as Ray Norcross had the year before, backed by the prestige of New York; yet she was almost as much of a sensation. Her father's business had lately brought the family from Des Moines, and her gifts were such that

Des Moines thenceforth became, in the imagination of the other children, a place of legendary wonder and delight. She could paint in water colours, play chords on the guitar, sing, recite poetry with appropriate gestures, and make astonishing tissue-paper flowers. Moreover, with her big blue eyes, wavy dark hair, and delicate colouring, she was a girl of striking appearance, and she wore her clothes, of which she had a large supply, with style. Her winter coat had a real beaver collar, and she carried a little round muff to match, but it was the shoes she wore to the first dancing class that filled the other girls with envious admiration, for they were of patent leather with tops of cream-coloured cloth, and none of the children had ever seen such shoes before.

For all her gifts and her possessions, Leta seemed an unassuming girl. Not until her mother visited the dancing class was it learned that she could do skirt dances, and it was only upon being urged by Miss Lightner and the children that she consented to perform, appearing in a lovely costume with pleated skirts of filmy pink gauze and executing a pretty butterfly dance. The applause which followed she accepted calmly, tripping to the centre of the floor and curtsying right and left with the studied grace and aplomb of a professional.

Leta was an only child. When callers came to see her mother, she would show them Leta's water colours, or summon her to the parlour to give a recitation, and the fact that the child always complied without protest made a favourable impression. "How beautifully you have brought your daughter

up!" the visitors would exclaim; whereat Mrs. Purnell, beaming, would tell of Leta's accomplishments. "She's always like that," she would say. "Being her mother, I suppose I oughtn't to speak of it—Mr. Purnell says I talk about her too much—but she really is an exceptional child, if I do say it. She's just as modest and unassuming as she can be, and I've never spoken a harsh word to her or punished her in any way. 'Leta, dear,' I say, 'Mamma wants you to do this—or do that,' and she does it right off without any argument. I never have to speak to her twice."

For a child, Leta was observant. She would remember the dresses other girls had worn to preceding sessions of the dancing class, and was quick with compliments for pretty clothes or jewellery. She spoke of Marie Hayes's bracelet and Myrtle Steinberg's pendant—a gold flower with a small diamond at the centre; and one day, when Alan and Blanche had been dancing together and, on the stopping of the music, took seats at her side, she leaned over, lifted Blanche's hand, and looked at the friendship ring, examining the engraving on both faces of the bangle.

"What a cute idea!" she said, and as if recognizing his initials, glanced at Alan, who blushed furiously.

He had never before seen the ring on Blanche's finger, and he wondered what had made her put it on. In one way, he wished she hadn't. The day after he gave it to her she had shyly thanked him for it, but thenceforth they never mentioned it, for somehow the ring had caused a slight embarrassment between them.

Now, seized by a swift instinct of self-protection, Alan assumed a lightly scornful air.

"Huh, that old ring!" he exclaimed. "I'd clean forgot about it."

Leta was tactful.

"Oh, I think it's very pretty," she declared.

"Aw, pshaw!" retorted Alan with a hollow laugh.

He was thankful when at this juncture the pianist started to play a schottische, for he was conscious of Leta's big blue eyes fixed on his face with a grave, inquiring expression. He felt as if she were looking through him, but just the same her eyes were awfully pretty.

"Can I have this one?" he asked her quickly, and without another look at Blanche, danced away with her.

Many years passed before he heard of the friendship ring again.

CHAPTER X

THE Shire residence, on the corner, was wider and a story taller than the five green stone houses occupied by tenants, and because of delays due to elaborate construction, fittings, and furnishing, December came before the house was ready.

Rumours of interior magnificence spreading through the neighbourhood incited certain ladies to don their sealskin sacques and call on Mrs. Shire and her daughter, but there were others who did not call. From the first, Mrs. Burchard had said she did not wish to know the Shires, and Mrs. Dunham, about to call, was stopped by her husband, who had lately heard gossip about Shire's daughter and Luke Holden, and had seen them together at Kinsley's and at the races. There was nothing in it, perhaps, but Luke was a married man and it didn't look well.

Similar tales reaching Martha Wheelock's ears greatly disturbed her. She knew that since meeting Florence Shire, Luke Holden had remained away from home much more than formerly. He was abstracted and irritable, and Nannie seemed to be sick a good deal of the time. Furthermore, having seen Mrs. Shire's painted face and dubious golden

hair, Martha began to detect in the daughter's pretty countenance a curious resemblance to the mother.

In no particular did Oakland more definitely reflect the New England from which its families were sprung, than in its Puritan circumspection. The scandal of the preceding year had been a poker game in which Tom Burchard, the Colonel's son, and several other young collegians were said to have played for money—a report sufficient to brand them in the eyes of the neighbourhood's strictest families as “fast.” With Mr. Pritchett's coming, a new record for dissipation was established, for the bicycle manufacturer drank, and advertised his drunkenness by shouting as he was driven home from downtown. But the sort of scandal suggested by these rumours concerning Florence Shire and Luke Holden was hitherto unknown. To the credit of the community be it said, however, there was no gleeful passing on of evil tidings, for it was felt that the misdeeds of any resident of the neighbourhood somehow reflected upon all, and aside from this, everyone was fond of Nannie Holden and Blanche.

Had the Shires been satisfied to settle quietly upon their corner and take things as they came, a direct issue might have been avoided; but in mid-December they sent out invitations to a housewarming, and the fact that the invitations were engraved seemed, in some subtle way, to add to their offence, for in the opinion of Oakland nothing less than a wedding warranted the elegance of copper-plate.

The invitations appeared to constitute a challenge, and the challenge was accepted. Though the party

was to be held on New Year's Eve, more than two weeks hence, the Burchards, the Dunhams, and several other families sent by return mail their formal regrets; others, less direct, delayed for a time, hoping thereby to make the Shires think that something had actually interfered with their acceptance; and still others waited, indecisive as to what course to pursue.

Among the latter were the Wheelocks. Left to their own inclinations, they would have immediately regretted, but from this they were deterred by consideration for Nannie Holden. Like everyone else, Martha Wheelock was wondering how much Nannie knew—and how much Florence Shire's parents knew. How was the situation to be met? So far as the Wheelocks were concerned, the answer to that question lay with Nannie. If Nannie was going, it wouldn't do for her friends to stay away, for that would only point the situation.

An apparently casual inquiry made by Martha Wheelock developed the fact that Nannie had accepted, and so the Wheelocks did the same; nor, when Mrs. Burchard expressed surprise at hearing of this, did Martha offer any explanation.

On the night of the party, the Wheelocks permitted themselves to arrive late. A gas lamp was burning brightly in the portico as they ascended the wide stone steps; light streamed through the plate-glass panel of the front door, and even before the door was opened by a coloured man in evening dress and white gloves, they heard the sound of music.

Moving across the spacious hall, glistening with

golden oak from floor to ceiling, they passed, on one side, a suit of armour, and on the other a tall oak clock, elaborately carved, which, as they ascended the stairs, struck the hour with a lingering metallic note that jarred discordantly against the music. The enormous bedchamber in which Martha left her wrap was at the front of the house. The walls, decorated with plaster scrolls, were tinted a yellowish green; the silken draperies were pink, having a purplish cast; and the massive furniture was of carved oak, to match the woodwork. Coloured engravings of females partially swathed in gauze hung by wires from the picture moulding and through a mirrored door, standing partially open, was visible a wall of white tile glittering in reflected light.

As with her father and her brother Martha descended the stairs, she observed that the former bore himself with an air of curious rigidity; but Harris showed his restlessness by fumbling at his white-lawn tie and at the lapels of his dress coat.

"How long do we have to stay?" he asked in a whisper, but Martha, seeing the Shires advancing to meet them, did not reply. Mrs. Shire's evening gown was of light blue velvet, and Florence wore cream lace over pink taffeta; both dresses were cut V-shaped, front and back, and were fitted tight around the waist and bosom, the arms being covered almost to the shoulders by white gloves.

"It is a great honour to welcome you to our home," said Shire, vigorously shaking Zenas Wheelock's hand; and the greetings of his wife and daughter were so effusive that Martha felt embarrassed.

The vast oak parlours with their tufted chairs, stiff lace curtains, marble statues, mirrors, and huge vases, looked cold and empty, though they contained a score of guests, among whom Martha recognized the Pritchetts, Murphys, Steinbergs, and Purnells. Mr. Purnell she had not met before. He was a blond man, large and amiable, and he had no sooner been introduced than he began to talk to her about Des Moines. He and his wife had known everybody in Des Moines, he said. Chicago was an awfully big place to come to as a stranger. As for him, he'd rather be a big toad in a small puddle. Still, there were advantages here that you couldn't get in smaller cities. He told her about Leta's cleverness, saying that she was going to study crayon at the Art Institute and "take vocal." Here and there Martha put in a sympathetic word, but she was looking past Mr. Purnell, watching her father, to whom Mrs. Shire was introducing the new neighbours. Mrs. Murphy, Mrs. Purnell, and Mrs. Steinberg were grouped around him looking up into his face, and there was something in their attitudes that made Martha think of sightseers gazing at heroic statuary.

Presently Nannie Holden joined her, and together they drifted away from the insistent orchestra, taking seats beside a bank of palms, but Martha was no sooner in her chair than she regretted the move. On a sofa in the next room, directly in her line of vision, sat Luke Holden and Florence Shire, and Nannie had only to turn her head to see them. They were leaning toward each other, talking gravely,

evidently unaware that they were observed. A waiter passed with a champagne bottle, and Florence beckoned him. As he was refilling their glasses, she glanced up, and catching Martha's eye, spoke quickly to Luke, who turned and glanced at his wife.

"It's draughty here," said Martha, rising, and as she shepherded Nannie to another chair, she wondered whether she had seen them.

A waiter presently approached, offering champagne, and Mr. Shire, noticing their refusal, volubly protested.

"Oh, that won't do, ladies!" he cried. "It's New Year's Eve, and everybody ought to celebrate *one* night in the year, even if they never touch it any other time. Nothing but champagne to-night in this house!" Calling the waiter back, he jovially reproached him. "George, you mustn't take no for an answer from anybody, see?" He filled two glasses and pressed them into the ladies' hands, continuing: "I'll bet you our new icebox is the biggest one you ever saw, and it's jam full of champagne to-night. Kinsley's going to serve the supper, and I gave him orders to send the best of everything. No bother for Ruby—she can just set back and let Kinsley's waiters run the whole shebang. Well, ladies, here's *to* you!" He lifted his glass, and Pritchett, coming up, did the same, declaring: "Nothing like a little champagne to make the wheels go round."

"Yes," replied the host, "it's the only stuff for celebrations, but beer's my steady drink. There isn't anything, when you get right down to it, that beats a good, cool glass of beer."

"Oh, yes, there is," asserted Pritchett. "This stuff beats it to death." And there ensued a discussion of the relative merits of beer and champagne which became so enthusiastic that neither man noticed when the ladies put down their glasses untouched.

But in spite of the champagne there remained something lacking about the party; it was like a complicated dish into which, when the ingredients refuse to blend, the cook desperately stirs wine. Throughout the evening Shire and his wife strove valiantly, now summoning a waiter to fill the glasses, now organizing square dances, now escorting sightseeing parties over the house, exhibiting everything from the icebox to the tiled bathrooms. Repeatedly Martha heard Shire's booming voice calling attention to the suit of armour by the front door, the elaborate Swiss music box with its several extra cylinders, and—most astonishing of all—the piano, an upright, which instead of being cased in wood like an ordinary instrument was covered entirely with heavy green plush.

"Eight separate coats of special glue to hold it on," she heard him explain. "There's just one other like it in the world, and that one was made to order for the Shah of Persia."

The supper, served shortly before midnight, was as elaborate as Shire had led his guests to expect. It was passed around by Kinsley's white-gloved waiters, and those who could not find convenient tables or ledges on which to put their plates managed them as best they could in their laps. The company was still

engaged with the repast when the loud-voiced clock in the hall struck the hour of midnight; whereupon the host signalled to the orchestra and called upon everyone to stand and sing "Auld Lang Syne."

With chinaware, glasses, and napkins all to be managed, this created some difficulty, and Mrs. Murphy, in her haste to rise, dropped her plate of ice cream on the parlour floor, and trying to catch it, let her champagne glass go as well. The crash of breaking glass and china on the first bar of the song silenced some voices for a moment, but the orchestra kept on, and the song was resumed by all but Mrs. Murphy and Shire, the former falling to her knees and starting to mop up the mess with her napkin, while the latter, momentarily forgetting the presence of Kinsley's excellent waiters, ran to the pantry for a towel.

"It's nothing at all, nothing at all," he assured the embarrassed lady as the servants brushed the débris into a dustpan. "That's the beauty of a fine hardwood floor like this. You could spill ink on this floor, and if you wiped it up quick enough, it wouldn't do much harm."

"But that lovely plate!" grieved the lady.

"Don't you fret about the plate," said Shire. "There's plenty more where that came from. The only thing I was worried about was my Oriental rug. You can spill anything you want to, Mrs. Murphy, and welcome, as long as you don't damage that. It cost me four hundred and fifty dollars, that rug did, and the man at Field's tells me there's not a finer one of the size in the whole city of Chicago." He turned

to one of the servitors. "Bring the lady another plate of ice cream and some more champagne." Then moving to the centre of the room, he addressed the company in a loud voice.

"Friends," he said, lifting his glass, "I want to propose a toast for the New Year, and I'll do it as soon as Mrs. Murphy gets her fresh glass of champagne. In the meantime, I want to say on behalf of Mrs. Shire and myself and our daughter what a great pleasure it is to have you with us to-night. Though newly moved here, as you know, we intend to take our proper place in the life of this district and we trust that this party to-night will serve to show our desire to establish the best of relations with one and all."

As the waiter handed Mrs. Murphy her glass, Shire paused, then he continued:

"I don't set up to be much of a speaker or much of a poet, either, but I've written a toast in honour of this occasion, and this is it:

"Here's to the friends we love so true;
Here's to the old friends and the new;
Here's to the cup that gives us cheer;
Here's to success through all the year."

So saying, he lifted his glass and drank, and the others having done likewise, there fell a brief silence which was broken by Mrs. Purnell.

"What a perfectly lovely toast!" she exclaimed. "Do you really mean to say you composed it yourself, Mr. Shire?"

"Why, yes, ma'am," replied the host, evidently gratified. Being without a napkin, he lightly wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and added: "I dashed it off to-night just before you all came."

"Well, I'd certainly like to have a copy of it," said Mrs. Purnell. "I want Leta to recite it. Don't you think it's perfectly lovely, Mrs. Steinberg?"

Mrs. Steinberg quickly replied that she did, and several of the other ladies were adding words of praise when one of the musicians came up and asked Mr. Shire whether the orchestra would longer be required.

"Goodness, yes!" he cried. "We're going to make a big night of it. Going to dance the New Year in. Come on, everybody! Come, Mrs. Holden—you be my partner this time!" Seizing Nannie's hand, he started to lead her toward the centre of the floor, but she hung back.

"Really, Mr. Shire," Martha Wheelock heard her say, "I—I think you'll have to excuse me. I'm feeling ill. I must be going home."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Shire, dropping her hand. "A little champagne will fix you up all right, though. Here, waiter, bring this lady a glass."

"No, thanks, really," protested Nannie, who was looking very pale. "If you'll be so kind as to call my husband——" She dropped into a chair, and Martha Wheelock, alarmed at her appearance, went to her. Simultaneously the music struck up, and Martha, looking about for Luke, saw him dancing with Florence Shire in the next room. Watching, she perceived that Shire stopped them; but Luke,

after glancing through the door at Nannie, resumed the dance, and Shire returned to say that he would come as soon as it was over.

"He thought you wouldn't mind waiting just a few minutes," he explained to Nannie. "My daughter's a lovely dancer, and they just——"

Nannie had closed her eyes, but now she opened them and looked up at him, saying in a weak voice:

"I don't think I'd better wait."

"I'll get him," declared Martha, and forthwith went out upon the floor and stopped the couple.

"Luke," she said, "I'm afraid you don't realize that Nannie's ill."

"Oh, I guess it doesn't amount to anything," he replied. "I'll be there in a minute." And with that he danced away.

"But, Luke——"

He seemed not to hear, and so Martha sought her father and told him what had happened.

The old man's eyes hardened. "I'll see to it," he said sternly, and started toward Luke, but she detained him.

"Luke must have had too much to drink," she said. "That's the only way I can account for his behaviour. Clearly that girl has turned his head, and if you speak to him now, I'm afraid it will make it more difficult for Nannie. We must take her home as quickly as possible. You find Harris and get your things."

Leaving Mrs. Purnell with Nannie, she hastened upstairs for her wraps. When she descended, the music had stopped, but Luke had not appeared. She did not look for him again, but asked Mr. Shire to

tell him that his wife had gone, and joined her father and Harris, who were already assisting Nannie down the steps. By the time they reached the house, she was so weak that the two men had to carry her up to her room, and while Martha was putting her to bed, Harris went for the doctor. Before he came, Nannie had fallen into a coma, and after one look at her, he dispatched Harris with an urgent message for Luke, who returned with him, looked vaguely at his wife, and upon being told there was nothing he could do, went to his room and without undressing fell asleep.

At dawn the doctor sent Martha to wake him, and he came in silent and haggard and sat with the others at the bedside. Nannie's pulse was barely perceptible, and with the coming of the light it ceased to beat.

The suddenness of the disaster left them dazed. Luke stared blankly at the doctor, and when Martha, having gone to the kitchen, returned to summon the others for coffee, she found him sitting with the same look of stupefaction on his face.

Harris went out into the gray morning to send telegrams, and a few moments later Zenas Wheelock, who had insisted on remaining through the night, went home, giving Luke not so much as a sidewise glance by way of farewell.

For Martha the situation was less simple. She had been thinking of Blanche; it was daylight now, and the disturbance in the house might awaken her at any time. Someone must go to her and break the news. Manifestly the duty was her father's, but he did not look fit for it, so she volunteered for the task.

"I wish you would," he said.

She started toward the stairs, but as she began the ascent, he spoke again, and she paused with her hand on the oak railing.

"Of course," he declared dully, "I didn't realize about Nannie." Slumped down on the bench near the front door, he did not look at her.

"Luke," she answered in a resolute tone which brought his eyes to hers, "there's only one thing left that you can do for Nannie. From now on, you must put Blanche first." And as he stared at her without replying, she added significantly: "Blanche must come before anybody else—anybody at all. Do you understand me, Luke?"

Letting his eyes fall, he nodded, and Martha Wheelock marched upstairs.

CHAPTER XI

FOR a time after Nannie's death the Wheelocks clung to a hope that the tragic circumstances would shock Luke Holden out of his infatuation for Florence Shire. Always fastidious in his dress, his mourning costumes were unexceptionable, but apparently he saw no incongruity between habiliments of woe and daily calls on the young woman. When in the spring Florence's father bought her a saddle horse, Luke also bought one, and thereafter they rode together, he resplendent in striped trousers and tail coat, with a wide crape band on his silk hat; she, likewise silk-hatted, in a habit of olive-green with a full skirt, and a tight jacket that displayed her pretty figure.

Equestrianism was no novelty to Oakland; Colonel Burchard, Mr. Dunham, and several others rode horseback; but Luke and Florence, riding always with each other, kept the neighbourhood continually reminded of their equivocal relationship and continually speculating upon the outcome. Moreover, Shire bought, that spring, the turnout for which his wife and daughter had long been clamouring, and Florence frequently drove in the new victoria to Luke's office and rode home at his side through the crowded boulevards.

"She doesn't mean to let him escape," observed the neighbours.

Had she called for him with a buggy, a runabout or a surrey, the breach of taste would, in the circumstances, surely have been noticed, but the character of the Shires' new turnout seemed in some subtle way to make the offence greater. The spectacle presented by a man and a woman lolling back in a victoria seemed to signify an intimacy, a feeling of possessiveness between them, which never would have been suggested had they sat bolt upright in a plainer vehicle. Partly because it was the Shires', partly because it represented an assault upon the district's ancient habit of simplicity, Oakland frowned upon the victoria. Who were these Shires, anyway, that carriages of kinds good enough for their neighbours were not good enough for them? If they were so determined to put on extra style, why didn't they keep a pair of trotters as Colonel Burchard did? Fast trotters were of some use, whereas this equipage with its elaborate contours, its ponderous high-stepping horse, jingling silver chains, and liveried and booted coachman, seemed to represent only wasteful luxury and show.

Among the hired men who lived in the stables on the alley, the turnout was equally a sensation. Like the Wheelocks' man, Jason, most of them were Negroes, and the Shire grandeurs fascinated them. Their interest now was centred chiefly in the English coachman.

"Mist' Shire, he got dat white man all dress' up like monkey on hand-o'gan," Jason remarked to

Alan, as they stood one afternoon in the barn door and watched the victoria drive into the Shires' stable.

"Yes," added Mr. Dunham's Joe, with a cackling laugh, "an' ev'y time de madam speak, he jerk his han' up to his hat—'Yes, ma'am'—'No, ma'am'—up go his han' ev'y time. An' he wouldn't cut de grass, oh tend furnace, oh wash de windows. No, *sub!* He ain't no hi'd man—he dude *coachman*." There was irony in his accent on the final word.

In these spring days Alan and the other boys spent much time in the alleys and the stables, talking with the hired men, who were their staunch friends and allies. Mr. Dunham's Joe—always spoken of as "Little Joe"—was an old Negro born in slavery; in his youth he had been a jockey; wherefore, unlike the other hired men, he was more interested in running than in trotting races. On the varnished walls of his carriage room hung a coloured lithograph of Modesty, the thoroughbred that won the first Chicago Derby, and another of Volante, last summer's Derby winner, with the jockey, Murphy, who rode them both. Jason, on the other hand, had pictures of trotters—Controller, the horse that did ten miles in twenty-seven minutes, twenty-three and one fourth seconds, and Maud S. with Aldine as a tean-mate, both incredibly extended, making their record mile.

No neighbourhood happening of any consequence escaped the shrewd eyes of the hired men, and their deductions from what they saw were, often, amazingly accurate.

"I guess Miss Blanche, she goin' have new mamma pretty soon," Jason remarked to Alan one after-

noon as they watched Luke Holden assisting Florence Shire to her saddle.

It was the first time that such a possibility had occurred to Alan.

"Why, you must be crazy," he said.

"You wait an' see," answered Jason. "Mebbe I crazy an' mebbe I ain't. She mighty pretty young lady, dat Miss Shire, and she look at Mist' Holden like de cat look at cream."

Florence Shire, Blanche's stepmother! The thought was sickening. Alan had loved Aunt Nannie, and her passing had brought to him his first realization of death. Already the picture of her in his mind was growing dim, like a portrait painted on gauze, but the memory of her sweetness remained with him, and lately he had begun to understand what people meant when they said that Blanche was like her. Since her mother's death he had noticed the resemblance. It was the eyes, he thought.

That evening he mentioned Jason's prophecy to his Aunt Martha, and he was shocked when she acknowledged a fear that Jason might be right.

"You must be very careful," she warned him, "not to say anything about it. We've been afraid of it for some time, and I can't tell you how I dread the possibility on Blanche's account. Naturally, her mother's death has been a terrible shock to her, and it's all the harder for her because she's like her mother—she's the kind that doesn't say much." Miss Martha paused and looked out of the window at what had been Nannie Holden's garden; then, turning to Alan, she continued:

"You're so young that it's difficult to have to talk to you about this, but I want to explain something to you. We don't like the Shires, but we're going to try to keep friends with them and with Luke Holden. No matter what happens, we must keep on good terms, so that Blanche will always have us to fall back upon. You see, if he should marry Miss Shire and we let them see how we felt, it would cut Blanche off from us entirely. And that, above all things, mustn't happen. I'm telling you this so that you'll help as much as you can."

"I hate him!" exclaimed Alan.

"Well," said his aunt, "we mustn't let our feelings carry us away. We must do what Nannie Holden would want us to do. Your grandfather is not a good dissembler, but even he is trying."

"Of course," she went on, "there's still a chance that Luke will come to his senses and realize his duty to Blanche. We haven't yet given up that hope."

But as the summer wore away, the hope diminished, for Luke and Florence were constantly together. When in August the Shires went to a summer resort in Michigan, Luke departed with them, leaving Blanche at home in charge of an elderly nurse. Presently, however, it was arranged that the two should move over to the Wheelocks', and though Blanche had become quieter than ever, it was apparent to Martha that the change pleased her.

Several times during the first part of Blanche's visit, Martha urged her to join Alan when he went to play with the other children; and Alan, who was full of pity for her, tried to induce her to come, but

Blanche hung back. She seemed satisfied to sit for hours with Martha in her room while the latter was reading, working at her desk, or doing the mending.

"It's so peaceful here," she would say, drawing her chair closer to Martha's. "I'd rather stay with you if you don't mind."

Her only outdoor interest was in her mother's garden. The fact that her father had dismissed the gardener evidently troubled her, and she and Martha Wheelock spent much time that summer working among Nannie's flowers, watering them, staking them up as they grew tall, spraying the rose bushes. When the yellow roses which had been Nannie's favourites came into bloom, Blanche cut them, and, as long as they lasted, kept a bowl filled with them on her mother's bureau.

Occasionally she spoke of Nannie, and when she did so, it was always as if she were speaking of someone in the next room. "Mother likes me to do this—or doesn't like me to do that," she would say. Her black dresses accentuated her pallor, and her eyes looked very large, but she had not wept, so far as Martha knew, since the gray New Year's morning when she awakened her to hear the tragic news. It would be better for her, Martha often thought, if only she would weep instead of repressing her feelings as her mother used to do; and she was thankful that sometimes when she went to Blanche's room and kissed her good-night, the child would show emotion by clinging to her in the dark.

When Luke came back with the Shires in September, Blanche and her nurse moved home, and matters

went on much as before, save that Florence Shire began to show Blanche little kindnesses, taking her to drive, or downtown to matinées. These attentions, while they seemed to indicate that Florence looked forward to a closer relationship with Luke's daughter, were, considering all the circumstances, rather encouraging than otherwise to Martha. Perhaps, in spite of her treatment of Nannie, Florence was not entirely heartless. Perhaps she felt contrition for what she had done and would try to atone for it by being kind to Nannie's child.

That autumn two further facts thrust themselves upon Martha Wheelock's notice. First, Luke's mourning was modified, black giving place to subdued notes of colour; and second, and more significant, Florence Shire was consulted about Blanche's winter wardrobe.

Blanche innocently told Martha about it.

"We aren't going to have the seamstress in to make my dresses," she said. "Miss Shire doesn't like seamstresses. They're going to take me down to Field's on Saturday."

Later, she confided to Martha that, although her new dresses were more expensive than any she ever had, she didn't like them.

"I told Father they weren't as plain as the dresses Mother liked me to wear, but Miss Shire said it was all right for me to wear bright colours now."

When, one evening shortly after the first of the year, Luke called on Martha Wheelock and informed her that he and Florence were soon to be married, the intelligence did not surprise her—though the call

did, for Luke had not been inside the Wheelocks' house for months.

"Florence admires you very much," he said self-consciously, "and we wanted you to know. It will be the quietest wedding possible; we aren't asking any one. The announcements will be sent out after we've gone to California."

"I hope you'll be happy," Martha managed to say, and with feeling she added: "I hope Blanche will be happy, too."

"That's what I wanted to speak to you about," he said. "Florence is perfectly lovely with her; she's going to make her a fine mother; but fond as Blanche is of her, I suppose the idea may upset her a little, and we were wondering—she was so contented here last summer—whether it would be imposing to ask you to take her in again while we're gone. It will be about six weeks."

"We'd love to have her. Does she know yet?"

"Florence will tell her pretty soon."

At twilight, a few days later, when Martha was writing at her desk, under a jointed gas fixture that protruded from the wall, there came a rap at her door, and the instant she heard Blanche's voice, she knew that the blow had fallen.

The child came quickly to her side and, gazing with frightened eyes into her face, announced:

"Florence Shire says she's going to marry Father."

Martha put her arms around her.

"I know," she answered.

"Oh, Aunt Martha!"

Martha drew her to her lap.

"You'll have to be brave about it, Blanche, dear."

"I don't like her!" The child's body stiffened.

"I think," Martha declared justly, "that she's been doing all she could to make you like her."

"But I don't, I don't! Couldn't I come here to live?"

"It would make us very happy if you could," Martha replied, "but I don't see how it's possible." And as Blanche drooped, she continued: "Of course, you'll be with us a great deal. Did Miss Shire tell you that you're to stay here while they're away—six whole weeks?"

Martha felt the slender arms tighten around her.

"And after that I'll have to go to them?"

"You can stay as long as your father will let you. How would you like me to run over now and ask him if you can stay here to-night with me?"

"Oh, I can stay, all right. Father's not there. They've gone downtown to dinner and the theatre. All I have to do is tell nurse."

Martha took Blanche into her own bed that night. In the long dark hours through which the child's uneasy slumbers kept her awake, she pondered over Blanche's future. What would become of her? Would Luke continue to neglect her? Would Florence be kind, or was her recent show of kindness put on merely to make her own plans run more smoothly? Reviewing what she knew of Luke and Florence, she could find no reason to expect of them anything but selfishness. Luke's selfishness was cold, Florence's that of a sleek, pretty kitten. And what Blanche needed was love.

“Things always look worst when one lies awake and worries at night,” Martha reminded herself, and she tried to put the problem out of her mind; but it kept thrusting itself back. Why was life often so cruel to the helpless and the young? It had been cruel to Nannie, and she had been as little able to meet it as Blanche was now. Indignation against Luke Holden rose in her bosom like a hot flame, and died down again. After all, how much were people like Luke and Florence to blame for the things they did? Hadn’t Nature made them as they were? Was it anybody’s fault? The imperfections of the world lay leaden on Martha Wheelock’s heart. Life was like some great machine, disorganized, broken, yet running furiously, driven by a terrible, inexorable force. What was that force? What was the purpose of all this grinding and breaking? The only answer she could find was that Nature, with complete indifference to individuals, pursued ruthlessly her single aim—the replenishment of the earth. There was no mercy. Those who escaped torture were the fortunate ones. They could do little enough to succour the others, but what they could do they must. The only help she could give Blanche was to be with her as much as Luke would permit. She would see him next day and, on the ground that he was now so busy, ask that Blanche’s visit begin at once.

CHAPTER XII

OF THE older residents of the district, none but the Wheelocks made any pretext of maintaining neighbourly relations with Luke and Florence Holden after their return from their wedding journey; and even the Wheelocks, determined as they were, for Blanche's sake, to keep up a semblance of friendship, saw but little of them. The Pritchetts seemed now to be their principal friends on the block; their social life was led chiefly in other parts of the city, and the guests who came to their house were for the most part strangers to Oakland.

Without in the least realizing the underlying reasons for their parents' disapproval of the union, the children of the neighbourhood also disapproved. Never before had there occurred a second marriage among people they knew, and the very evident gap between Luke Holden's age and that of his wife struck them as grotesque. Moreover, like children everywhere, those of Oakland had acquired, from fairy tales and juvenile fiction, the impression that all stepmothers were cruel. No less than their parents, though for different reasons, they resented the second Mrs. Holden, but whereas the adults signified resentment by ignoring her, the children took more active measures.

One of the boys composed a couplet to celebrate the return of the bride and groom:

“Mrs. Holden, for your life,
Mr. Holden’s second wife—”

and his companions, pleased with the jingle, gathered in the dark outside the lighted windows of the Holden house, and chanted it in unison at the top of their lungs, then fled in all directions. This rite, having been gone through with on several successive evenings, evidently palled on someone in the house, for one night as the serenaders met at the accustomed point, a deluge of water descended upon them from an upper window. Had anything been required to stimulate youthful enthusiasm, this was sufficient. Thereafter the offensive couplet echoed nightly through the neighbourhood until it became clear that further reprisals were not to be expected, and the children lost interest in the pastime.

The anarchist riots and a succession of strikes had filled Chicago with unrest; several burglaries had lately occurred in Oakland, and Blanche was afraid when left in the house after dark with the servants. As Luke and Florence went out a great deal, they began sending her to the Shires when they expected to be away from home until late, but Florence’s parents found Blanche difficult—not because she said or did anything to which they objected, but because she said and did nothing.

“That child gives me the creeps, sitting so quiet and staring at us with her great big eyes,” Mrs.

Shire informed her daughter. "If she's so crazy to go to the Wheelocks' and they want her, why not let them have her?"

Thus it happened that soon afterward Blanche spent a night with Martha, and the change having once been made, she continued to go to the Wheelocks' when Luke and Florence were away.

In the meantime, the Oakland boom, though not so great a boom as some enthusiasts had hoped, went steadily on, new houses rising on the Wheelocks' block and the blocks adjacent. Though the bicycle business was prospering, Mr. Pritchett found that his narrow lot on the corner to the south, where the oaks used to stand, contained more land than he required, and sold off his side yard to a friend whose pink stone house, one wall of which adjoined the Pritchetts' wall, was now nearing completion.

Alan Wheelock, too, was building that spring. He had started by constructing a seat in the double crotch of one of the lindens beside his grandfather's house, but his idea had expanded, and the seat presently became the floor of a shanty, perched some twenty feet above the ground. The only difficulty with the shanty was that the roof leaked, and Grant Hayes—who, under the terms of an agreement signed by both boys in blood drawn from pricked fingertips, had become Alan's "pardner" in the enterprise—arrived one afternoon with the announcement that he had discovered a way to remedy the trouble. The new house next the Pritchetts' was being roofed with tar and gravel, and one of the workmen had

promised Grant some tar if he would bring a pail. As the tar was hot, it was necessary to make haste, and Grant suggested that the Wheelocks' milk pail be used. Alan, it should be said, had grave doubts as to the advisability of this, but he allowed Grant to persuade him that the pail could afterward be cleaned.

The roofing of the shanty proved a task more arduous than they had expected. The tar dripped down inside, trickled over the edges of the roof, and coated the tree-trunk, but they continued to pour it on, spreading it with sticks.

"There," exclaimed Alan with satisfaction when, having finished, he and Grant took seats on a branch to survey their handiwork, "I'd just like to see any rain get in through that!"

Grant was looking at him strangely.

"Gee, but you look awful!" he said.

"Not any awfuller than you do. You got it all over you. Your hair's full of it."

"So's yours."

"We better go in and clean up," suggested Alan, and they descended, discovering on the way that drippings had fallen to the limbs over which they travelled.

Delia O'Shea was at the sink when they entered the kitchen, and they were halfway across the room when, turning, she stopped them with a shriek.

"Git out! Git out o' me kitchen! Look what ye've done to me flure!"

Retreating, the boys waited on the back steps

until Delia's indignation subsided, when Alan parleyed with her and finally gained permission to re-enter, provided he and Grant first removed their shoes.

At the foot of the back stairs he paused to ask advice.

"Say, Delia, how do you get tar off?"

"Scrape it off with a knife," answered the cook, ruefully surveying the black footprints on the floor.

"I mean, how will we get it off of us?"

"Ye won't." So saying, Delia, with an old knife in her hand, dropped to her knees and began scraping at the sticky spots.

Reaching the bathroom, the boys removed their trousers and shirts and essayed with soap and water to scrub the blotches from their hands, faces, and hair, but the more they worked, the more definitely they perceived the adhesive properties of tar. Washing seemed but to affix it the more firmly; a comb applied to the hair, far from removing the mucilaginous mat, merely extended its area, and towels, while making no apparent inroads on the black veneer, yet absorbed enough of it to preclude for ever their reappearance in polite society.

"I'll get licked for this," said Grant morosely.

"Maybe Aunt Martha could help us get it off," suggested Alan, and thrusting his head out of the bathroom door, he shouted an appeal to her.

But even Martha Wheelock, after long and strenuous scrubbing, was unable to remove the darker spots.

"I'm afraid it will have to wear off," she announced with a sigh.

Though their outer clothing was ruined, Grant had to resume his tar-stained garments in order to go home; and Alan, having donned his Sunday suit and his best shoes, went with his aunt to the back porch, where a glance at his discarded footwear convinced her that its usefulness was ended.

"We'll go over to the Corners," she said, "and get you another pair."

Alan, uncomfortably aware of the mottled appearance of his face, had no desire to be seen upon the street, but as he was about to suggest postponement, he saw Jason come from the cow shed and pick up from the ground, under the tree, the tarry pail.

"We better be starting," said Alan. Hastily he moved toward the corner of the house, but Jason overtook them.

"Somebody done dilapidated mah milk pail," he announced to Martha, exhibiting the wreck. "Ah lef' it hanging in de cow barn, an' when Ah comes to——" Catching sight of Alan's face, he broke off, exclaiming: "*Oh-h!* Mebbe Ah could assuhtain 'bout it f'om dis-yere young cullud gent'man." And addressing Alan: "Young cullud gent'man, has you been milkin' black cows?"

"Shut up!" retorted Alan.

"Oh, 'scuse *me!*" Jason's manner suggested polite surprise. "Ah see now 'at you *ain't* cullud. You jes li'l spotty, dass all."

Walking through the streets at his aunt's side, Alan was conscious that passing strangers looked at him

with curiosity; the shoe clerk remarked upon the condition of his face, and when, having purchased new footgear, they went on to the hardware store, Mr. Murray, the proprietor, who came forward to wait on them, inquired solicitously about the spots.

"Looks like tar," he remarked, and upon being informed that it was indeed tar, he recommended benzine for its removal, warning them, however, not to let it get into Alan's eyes.

When Martha told Mr. Murray her errand, he replied that he no longer kept milk pails in stock.

"Nowadays, you see, Miss Wheelock," he explained, "most folks take milk of dealers. What with all this building, there isn't much room for cows any more."

Pushing his old straw hat to the back of his head, he rested his bare forearms on the back of a showcase filled with scissors, carving sets, and pocket knives, and discussed, from a hardware point of view, the change that had come over Oakland.

"In the old days," he said, "we had considerable call for light farm implements, but last few years it's been garden tools. Quite a run on croquet and tennis sets, too. You see, most of these people that live in the new blocks are renters." Mechanically he straightened a pile of paint cans on an adjacent counter, adding ruefully, "Some of 'em aren't any too particular about paying their bills, either."

On the way home, Martha seemed to see the district with new eyes. The streets between the Corners and the lake were lined with houses; blocks to the north, south, and west were likewise thickly

settled; vacant lots, once so common, were becoming scarce, and it struck her as significant that she and Alan walked as far as the Shires', passing many people, without meeting any one they knew.

"You needn't say anything to your grandfather about the milk pail," she told Alan. "It would trouble him to know that Mr. Murray doesn't keep them any more."

Rounding the corner, they came upon Blanche and Marie Hayes. Marie was skipping rope while Blanche counted, but on sight of Alan they stopped and stared.

"Goodness, Alan," exclaimed Marie, "what's the matter with your *face*?"

"Aw," he retorted, "what's the matter with yours?"

"Alan, Alan!" chided Martha, but unheeding he continued:

"Looks like a big hunk of putty—that's what it looks like!"

There had come upon him a madness kindled not by Marie's words, but by the silent scrutiny of Blanche.

"Won't it come off of him?" Blanche, speaking as impersonally as if he had been the kitchen floor, lifted inquiring eyes to Martha Wheelock.

"You go chase yourself!" Alan flung out. "You just go chase yourself around the block!" And frowning darkly at her he strode on.

"Really, Alan," protested his aunt when Blanche and Marie were out of earshot, "there was no occasion to be rude. I can't understand you."

Nor could Alan understand himself. He hated to have Blanche see his tar-stained face. He was wretched. But nobody must suspect that he was wretched.

“Aw,” he said defiantly, “girls make me sick!”

CHAPTER XIII

A SON born to the Holdens two and a half years after their marriage arrived at a time doubly inopportune. Florence, who had set her heart on visiting the Paris Exposition that summer, was forced to abandon the project, and in addition Luke was greatly disturbed over an unfortunate investment.

Some years earlier he had put money into a quarry near Joliet; the business had not done so well as was expected; extra capital was now required to save the company from bankruptcy, and though his income was good, Florence's tastes were expensive, and he found himself without money to spare.

Because of the disorganization of the household, owing to the arrival of the baby, Blanche was spending some days with the Wheelocks, and Luke, coming home from the directors' meeting, sat alone at supper, pondering over his financial problems. Many times since they married he had spoken to Florence of economy, and she had repeatedly promised to be more careful, but he had come by degrees to understand that she regarded a promise merely as a convenient conversational gate through which to step away from unpleasant topics. She had, moreover, ingratiating little tricks, like those of a pretty kitten, and even after Luke perceived that she con-

sciously used her arts upon him, he still found them disarming. There was something fatuously paternal in his feeling for her. It was difficult to be stern with one so young, so pretty, so affectionate, and it became still more difficult when Florence, as she had more than once done, resorted to tears and reminded him that for his love she had imperilled her good name. Nevertheless, she must stop running up these enormous bills. She positively must. But, of course, he couldn't talk to her about it now. There was another subject, however, that mustn't be allowed to wait. This fancy name for the baby, "Elsmere," that Florence had taken from a book, wouldn't do at all.

Having eaten his baked apple, he ascended to his wife's room and announced his choice.

"But 'William' is such a plain name," Florence objected. She had just finished supper and was propped up on pillows looking very girlish with her long blonde braids.

"That's no drawback." He sounded the name over aloud, speaking it slowly: "William Shire Holden. A good solid ring to it. Besides, Flo, your father's a successful man, and this is his first grandchild. He's awfully pleased, and——"

"You mean you think he'll do something for him?" Florence glanced up with calculating eyes.

"Very likely."

"He's always wished he had a son," she said reflectively, and after a little more discussion she gave her consent; whereupon Luke left her, saying he was going to tell the baby's grandfather of their decision.

He found Shire in high spirits. He was seated in a tufted armchair with his slippered feet upon a hassock and a cigar between his teeth, and he proceeded to tell Luke of his interview, that afternoon, with a group of the city's prominent business men who were endeavouring to secure for Chicago the World's Fair to be held three years thence in celebration of the fourth centenary of the landing of Columbus.

"It begins to look like we might get it after all," he said. "Up to now I haven't thought we had much chance, what with New York and all these other cities bidding for it, and if Grover Cleveland had been reëlected last fall, I don't think we would stand any show. But these men saw President Harrison the other day, and they say that, being a Western man, he favours Chicago. I tell you, Luke, if we do get that Fair, it'll boom this city like nothing else could."

The subject of the proposed Fair having been exhausted, Luke informed his father-in-law of the name selected for the baby.

"Well, now, that's fine!" said Shire. "Just fine! The first thing when I get downtown to-morrow I'll start a savings account for the little fellow." He rose and beckoned Luke to the dining room. "An event of this kind is good for something special. What you say to a nice cold pint?"

Presently, over the champagne, Luke found an opportunity to broach the subject uppermost in his mind, and told Shire of the predicament of the quarry company.

"The long and short of it is," he finished, "the company will go to the wall unless we raise more capital, and I'm not in a position to put in money just now. If we can handle our financing and keep on developing the property, it ought to be very profitable in a couple of years more, so I thought I'd speak to you about it."

"Just what do you want me to do?"

"Well, if it looks as good to you as it does to me, I'd like to see you put money into it; or if you don't feel like doing that, I'd appreciate it if you'd lend me the money."

"H-m!" Shire stroked his chin reflectively. "I'll make some inquiries and see what I can do." He stared for a time at one of his slippered feet, moving it back and forth, then suddenly looked up, asking: "Why borrow money when you could get a good price for that big side yard of yours?"

"I couldn't very well sell that."

"Why not?"

"On account of my understanding with Zenas Wheelock."

"Were there any witnesses when you talked to him about it?"

"Just Nannie." As Luke spoke, his eyes shifted toward a window open to the street, whence came the hollow reverberation of hoofs passing at a slow trot over the cedar blocks. Shire too glanced toward the window as if listening, and it was not until the hoofbeats sounded faint in the distance that he spoke.

"Well"—he picked up his glass, and carefully set it down again, as if intent on placing it precisely

where it had stood before—"I can't see but what you're free to sell." He looked at Luke, and as the latter kept silence, buttressed his statement by adding emphatically: "Yes, sir, absolutely free."

"Mr. Wheelock wouldn't think so."

"Wheelock's an old fogey. If he had his way, this neighbourhood would have stood perfectly still."

"If I should decide to sell, I ought to offer it to him first."

Shire grinned. "All right. His money's as good as anybody else's."

"But he sold it to me for what he paid for it."

"Good Lord! You don't mean you'd think of letting him have it back on that basis, when you've been carrying it for years without any return? Go ahead and offer it to him if you want to, but put a good round price on it. If he's so anxious to keep it vacant, let him pay for the privilege!"

With the edge of his empty wineglass Luke was tracing invisible diagrams on the oaken surface of the table, and when he spoke, it was as if he were speaking to himself.

"There's a personal situation involved," he said, without raising his eyes.

"No, there isn't!" Shire spoke sharply. "People shouldn't confuse personal relations with business. Business is just a matter of dollars and cents—always. It's a matter of dollars and cents between you and me about this quarry; I'm going to look into it same as I would if you were a stranger; I'd be a fool if I didn't, and you'd be a fool to sell your land for less than it's worth."

To this Luke did not reply, but Shire may have interpreted the slight motion of his head as indicating acquiescence; at all events, he leaned back in his chair and in a calmer tone continued:

"In my opinion, it doesn't really matter a fish-hook whether you offer that land to the old man first or not. He won't buy."

"Why not?"

"Well, I've got a notion the Wheelocks haven't a whole lot of money to spare. Every now and then I ride uptown with Harris, and I notice he worries more and more over that Napier Place property. We came up on the train together last night, and he was fretting his head off. Says the deficit's bigger every year. He sees as plain as I do that his father's pig-headed about it, but he hasn't got the gumption to stand up and tell him so, and things just drift from bad to worse—that's how I size it up. When the old man dies, though, you just watch and you'll see Harris making tracks around to me. He hasn't forgot my advice. No, sir! And he wants money.

"I gorry, it's comical to see what different things people want money for. Harris takes the cake! Here he is, going around in those old baggy clothes, never so much as looking sidewise at a woman, just crazy for money to squander on musty books that no sane person would give shelf room. He was telling me yesterday about some old Shakespeare thing he thought he couldn't afford, and he blame' near cried over it. Called it an 'investment'—don't that beat all?

"Well, I told him just the same as I tell you—they

ought to build on that side yard of theirs, or else sell it to somebody that will." And with slow emphasis he added: "The thing to build now is flats."

Luke looked surprised.

"Don't you think flats would tend to damage the neighbourhood?" he asked.

"Not the kind I mean. Good ones. The women take to flats because they're less trouble to run, and the rent return to the owner's better than on houses. Now's the time to build 'em, too, with the World's Fair coming. It's bound to make a housing shortage."

"That sounds reasonable," said Luke, rising, "but it's not a thing I want to jump into without thinking it over. Of course, a flat building would crowd us more than a house would. I'll talk to Florence about it."

Near the front door he paused.

"I'll be glad if you'll look into this quarry proposition right away," he said. "We've got to take action inside of two weeks, and it's important for me to know where I stand."

"All right," replied his father-in-law with a casual wave of the hand, "you'll hear from me."

CHAPTER XIV

THE baby fascinated Blanche. She loved to be in the room with it. Though they assured her that all babies cried and that its wails signified nothing, she was distressed when it wrinkled up its face and howled, and was correspondingly delighted when Florence allowed her to comfort it by administering the bottle. Always she felt a tender mirth as she presented the bottle to the infant, abruptly checking its clamour and magically transforming anguish into gluttonous beatitude. She loved to watch it in the bath, and she marvelled at the useless little feet inanely kicking, and the tiny groping hands which, when she offered a finger, would close around it with astonishing tenacity. Not since her mother's death had she shown such interest in anything, and when, at the Wheelocks', she spoke of the baby, her face would brighten with a look of maternal affection. And, indeed, it was fortunate that she was so absorbed in her half-brother, for she was destined to give him, during the first years of his life, the major portion of her time.

As soon as Florence's health permitted, Luke talked with her about his financial difficulties, endeavouring to impress upon her the importance of economy, and he was touched when, after a tearful

scene, Florence proposed, as one means of cutting down expenses, to dismiss the "practical nurse" and take care of the baby herself. Florence's social activities, however, suffered no diminution and she soon found it expedient to transfer the baby's crib to Blanche's room. Every morning Blanche would bathe, dress, and feed the child, and before leaving for school would put him out on the porch in his carriage. In the afternoon, when the weather was favourable, she would wheel him up and down the block; if he slept, she would sit by the carriage on the porch doing her lessons; and frequently on stormy days she would take him to the Wheelocks' and sit with Martha. At night, after putting him to bed, she would finish her studies, and at ten would give him a final bottle, after which he usually slept till early morning.

Florence was proud of his blooming appearance. She would exhibit him to her visitors, and when they praised him she would say: "Yes, the doctor tells me he's in perfect condition, and it's because I take entire care of him myself."

Whether or not Florence believed what she said, the neighbours soon perceived the actual circumstances. Luke, to be sure, was known to have suffered financial reverses, but the effect of his reverses was visible only in Blanche. He and Florence entertained as much as ever; several nights a week the Holdens' house would be illuminated, and carriages strange to the district would drive up to their gate; but whereas Florence continued to dress as extravagantly as ever, Blanche's wardrobe was

becoming shabby. Moreover, she was growing fast, and but for opportune gifts from Martha Wheelock would have had to wear dresses too small for her. Martha also taught her to sew; in the fall of the year following the baby's birth, they found time to work on a party dress for the dancing class, a membership in which was Zenas Wheelock's present to Blanche on her sixteenth birthday.

She and Martha were greatly delighted with their handiwork. Having tried on the dress for the last time, she proudly carried it home and, after hanging it in her closet with great care, patting out the folds to prevent wrinkles, returned to the Wheelocks', where she had left the baby.

Arranging him in his carriage, she beamed down upon him and with caressing emphasis exclaimed: "You've been a *good* boy, so now Sister's going to take you for a *nice* ride!"

"Wah!" responded the baby.

"Oh, Aunt Martha," cried Blanche, "isn't he clever!"

The autumn afternoon was radiant. The young maples along the street were changing colour; and the bright leaves, stirred by a fresh breeze, glittered in the sun like sparks of flame. In a vacant lot boys were playing football, and she was watching them as she wheeled the carriage, when from behind her came the warning jingle of a bicycle bell.

"Look out of the way!" a voice sounded sharply in her ear. Simultaneously, a safety bicycle caromed from a tree trunk at the border of the sidewalk and,

as Blanche turned the carriage and interposed her body, threw its rider against her.

"You're taking up the whole place!" he said angrily.

"You have no business on the walk!" she retorted, aroused by her charge's jeopardy.

At first glance she had judged the tall, dark youth a stranger, but now she recognized him.

"Why, Ray Norcross!"

His puzzled frown gave place to a smile.

"Oh, now I know who you are," he said. The smile faded, and he pursued sternly: "I wrote you a letter and you never answered."

"So many things have happened to me," she said, "and I suppose a lot has happened to you, too. I always think of you as travelling. Where have you been?"

"Mostly in India. My father had some jobs out there."

"You're at Colonel Burchard's?"

"Until we can get a house."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you're going to live in Chicago?"

"For a while, anyway. The old man's doing some buildings for the World's Fair."

"How nice!"

"Oh, I don't know." He shrugged. "New York's the place for me."

"I've never been there."

"Or Paris," he added as an afterthought.

His scrutiny embarrassed her. Perhaps it was because his eyes were so dark; they made you feel as

if you were under a magnifying glass. Troubled by the growing pause, she followed his conversational lead as best she could, saying:

"My father and his wife were going to the Paris Exposition last year, but they weren't able to, because of the baby."

"Oh." He looked at the carriage and back at her, and there was another pause which Blanche would have broken if she could have thought of anything to say.

"Quite a lot of changes around here," Ray presently remarked. Having glanced up the block, his eyes returned to her. "You've changed too. You're better looking."

Blanche felt herself blushing and, to escape further personalities, spoke of his bicycle.

"Yes," he said, "in another year or two you won't see high bikes any more. The safety's the only thing. This is a Victor."

After admiring the bicycle, Blanche moved to go. "I must be getting home," she said.

"Nonsense. Why? I haven't seen you in years."

"The baby mustn't be out after dark."

"Well, then, take her home, and we'll——"

"Him," she corrected. "It's a boy."

"All right—*him*, then." Ray smiled. It was a charming smile, a trifle one-sided, as if the left cheek were slightly more amused than the right. How well she remembered the whimsical expression it imparted to his face! "Take him home," he went on, "and I'll put up my bike and meet you out here in three minutes. We'll go and get a soda."

Quickly Blanche wheeled the baby home; her step-mother had not returned, so she left him with Nellie, the hired girl, and hastened out again to find Ray waiting at the gate.

Walking toward the Corners through the gathering twilight, they endeavoured to bridge the gap of years with little planks of conversation.

"What'll you have?" Ray asked as they took seats before the soda fountain.

"Strawberry soda."

"Ice-cream soda?"

She looked at him blankly, wondering what he meant; then, gathering that ice-cream soda was something she ought to know about, answered:

"Why, yes."

But when Ray transmitted the order to the druggist, the latter shook his head.

"I've heard about it," he said. "I guess you could get it at Gunther's or some of those big places downtown, but there's no call for it here."

"My goodness!" ejaculated the youth. "I didn't know there was *any* place where you couldn't get ice-cream soda nowadays. It's the only kind fit to drink. Well"—his tone was resigned—"give me a grape phosphate."

Evidently, when they left the drug store, he was still thinking of ice-cream soda, for presently he remarked:

"The Middle West is pretty crude still, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is," she conceded, "but you see, I haven't anything to compare it with."

"Too bad." He gave a little shake of the head.

"A girl like you ought to get around more. You'd love New York." Again she felt his keen gaze. "I'd certainly like to be with you the first time you see Broadway and Fifth Avenue. When we get back to New York—which of course we will as soon as the Fair's over—you must come and visit us."

Blanche thrilled at the idea.

"I'd love to!"

"Then it's settled," he announced. "That's what you'll do." He spoke with such assurance that for a moment she believed him. In imagination she fancied herself taking one of the sleek trains she had so often seen go by, arriving in New York, driving with Ray in a victoria through those famous streets that people talked about. It was summer; her dress was of flowered mull, over her shoulder she carried a lacy parasol, and——

The vision faded abruptly as in the dimness ahead she caught sight of the iron fence and the front gate of her father's house. The same old fence, the same old gate. How well she knew the click of the gate as the latch snapped into place! There was no other sound quite like it; and now, as she drew near, it struck her that of all sounds it was the most monotonous.

"Oh," she said bitterly, "what's the use of talking? It'll never happen! Nothing will ever happen!"

Ray seized her hand and pressed it.

"Yes, it will! And there's another thing that's positively going to happen. I'm going to see you soon!"

She broke away and entered the gate, and as she

moved through the dusk toward the steps and caught the metallic click of the latch behind her, she shivered.

The moment she entered the hall, she heard the baby. He was crying, and at that sound there swept over her a rush of affectionate concern that drove from her mind all thought of Ray, and sent her hurrying upstairs. In the front bedroom she found Florence holding the infant in her lap. Evidently she had just removed his coat and bonnet, for they were lying on the floor beside her. From his cries Blanche knew at once that he was uncomfortable, but when she reached out to take him, Florence pushed her away.

"Where have you been?" she demanded.

"To the Corners."

"Who told you you could leave the baby?"

"He was asleep, and I left him with Nellie. I wasn't gone more than twenty minutes."

"Yes, you were! I've been home that long myself, and he's been crying as if his heart would break."

"It's because you picked him up," Blanche innocently explained.

"Now, look here, young lady"—Florence was glaring at her—"you needn't try to tell me what to do with my own child! You were left here to take care of him and you went sneaking out. If such a thing happens again, I'll have to take him away from you." She stopped short, seemed for a moment to consider this possibility, and in a milder tone resumed: "I'll not tell your father about it this time, but, remember, if it ever occurs again——" The

threat was left suspended in the air. The baby continued to wail, and Blanche stood silent.

Suddenly, with an impatient gesture, Florence thrust the child at her.

"Oh, here," she exclaimed, "take him! I can't fool with him any longer. I've got to get dressed for company."

CHAPTER XV

ALAN WHEELOCK had never seen such interesting curios as were brought by the Norcrosses from New York to furnish the house they presently took on Drexel Boulevard, two blocks away. The halls, parlour, sitting room, dining room, even the bedrooms, were lined, like rooms in a museum, with exotic objects, souvenirs of many voyages; and while some of these objects—chairs and tables of carved teakwood, ebony cabinets, and a red lacquer throne that occupied the place of honour between the front windows of the parlour—were measurably utilitarian, others were employed purely for decoration, and not a few were of such strange appearance that Alan, inspecting them, wondered of what they were made, and for what purposes.

In the dining room hung a collection of weapons from all over the world. The inlaid helmet and shield above the sideboard were pieces of old Saracen armour, Ray said, and there were mediæval swords, long and heavy, Zulu spears, Arab pistols, Italian daggers, a highly ornamented Cossack sabre with no hilt, and a Malayan kriss with a heavy blade of such sinister suggestion that Alan's stomach contracted when he looked at it.

Between Alan's impression of the Norcross house and his impression of Ray, there existed a curious

parallel. As in the house certain objects puzzled him, so in Ray he was puzzled by certain qualities which fascinated and at the same time repelled him. With his liveliness, his volatility and his nimble wit, Ray could be charming. He had an immense fund of curious knowledge, interlarded with ignorance equally strange; and his prejudices, whether favourable or otherwise, were violent and unreasoning. He not only failed to conceal his personal aversions, but would deliberately advertise them by being rude; and similarly, when he took a fancy, whether to a boy or to a girl, he exhibited his ardour without reserve, insisting upon lending or giving his most treasured possessions to the favourite, whose enthronement was, however, likely to be brief.

To Alan he had apparently taken a strong liking. He was constantly inviting him to go on afternoon excursions downtown, or out to the World's Fair grounds, where the digging of lagoons had commenced, and when Alan found it necessary to refuse, Ray would become resentful. If the refusal was due to an engagement with someone else, his resentment was intensified, but even when study was the excuse, he would take on an injured air. Ray didn't seem to understand about schools. He had attended two or three schools in New York, one in Paris, another in Switzerland, and still another in Bombay, but had not stayed long in any one of them. "I've learned most from tutors," he told Alan, but he had not learned enough from tutors to get him into the high school attended by the other young people of the neighbourhood.

"Let's go down this afternoon to the Eden Musée," he suggested to Alan one day. "We can see the Chamber of Horrors, and there's a minstrel show with Billy Rice."

"Can't. I've got to work."

"Bosh! What do you want to do that for?"

"We're going to have exams."

"What of it? Teachers are a stupid lot. All you have to do is dazzle them a little, and they're perfectly satisfied."

"I don't see how to dazzle anybody in a solid geometry exam if you don't know what you're doing," replied Alan; and he added: "Besides, I'm not the dazzling kind."

Ray seemed to consider.

"I guess that's right," he agreed. "You're just a good old plugger. You've got a solid look about you; and you've got light hair, and it's shaggy and tough. You light-haired people don't fly off as quickly as we black ones do. Your kind has the balance, and my kind has the—I guess I'm a chump to say it, but I will just the same—the brilliance. Your hair's like a brush, and mine's fine. Haven't you ever noticed how many strong people have your kind of hair?"

Alan ran his hand over his head.

"Why, no."

"Well, it's so. Take my grandfather, for instance, or your own grandfather. They're old men, but they've got plenty of hair, and it's wiry. Your hair's like your grandfather's, and you're like him in other ways, too."

"I hope so," Alan said.

"You aren't a bit like your father," Ray went on, "but I'm like mine, and I'm blame' glad of it. He's the interesting one of our tribe—it's his Spanish blood. I wouldn't be like my mother for anything. She's sweet and all that, but she's got a notion she's artistic, and she isn't at all. She picks up things she hears the old man say, and repeats them, and imagines she's doing her own thinking."

"It doesn't sound very well for you to say it," observed Alan, but Ray did not take offence.

"There you are!" he responded. "You're too conventional. I guess that's one reason I like you, though. Opposites. You see, I believe in looking at things as they are."

Alan smiled. "You claim you look at things as they are, but how do you know for sure that it *is* the way they are? Who decides it?"

"I do!" Ray chuckled, and as if to jar Alan out of his seriousness, clapped him on the back. "I do, old Sobersides! 'The boy is father of the man'—who said that? No matter—I know just what you'll be like when you're a man. Old Sobersides, the prosperous burgher. You'll see. I may be prosperous, too, for that matter. I've decided I'm going to be an author. Some authors do pretty well, and even if I don't make money myself, I ought to be comfortably off. My grandfather's got plenty, and I guess my old man's got quite a bit, too. But money or no money, I'm going to have a good time out of life. Sobersides is welcome to the cash if I get the fun."

Even when Ray's ideas were most absurd, he was stimulating. In order to combat him, it was necessary to do some thinking, and Alan found himself in this period of his life formulating convictions of his own. But even when he felt most confident that he was right and that Ray was wrong, the mental gyrations of the other boy were too swift for him; under the arms and between the legs of common sense he dodged and darted at will.

He was most considerate of Alan when they were alone. If other young people were present, he showed a disposition to make fun of him, and Alan soon observed that this was most likely to happen if they were with Blanche.

At times it seemed as if Ray was very fond of Blanche. When, soon after the Norcrosses were settled in their house, he gave a party, he placed her on his right at table and throughout the evening was attentive to her. And when Ray was attentive to a girl he was able, somehow, to surround her with an invisible wall that effectually excluded other boys.

When, in November, Leta Purnell had a birthday party, Blanche, because of her duties, was unable to attend, and Ray, though he had accepted Leta's invitation, did not put in an appearance.

"Oh," he explained when Alan inquired about his absence, "I got to thinking about Blanche. I thought she might be lonely, so I went over there, instead, to see if I couldn't cheer her up a bit." And immediately he launched into abuse of Luke and Florence Holden for making, as he said, a servant of her

Yet sometimes he himself was far from kind to her. There were occasions when, for no apparent reason, he would ignore her, or say sarcastic things. More than once Alan recalled Ray's incomprehensible performance on that afternoon, years ago, when, having selected Blanche to lead the cotillion with him, he snowballed her on the way home. Did Blanche remember it, too, he wondered.

A few days before the first of Miss Lightner's dancing classes Blanche came over to see him.

"I'm sort of embarrassed, Alan," she said, "and I wanted to speak to you about it. Ray invited me to be his partner at the first class, and I told him I would. First I said I always went with you, but he asked if you'd invited me yet, and when I told him you hadn't, he said then of course I could go with him."

"Oh, *did* he?"

"You've always been so good about taking me places," she went on, "that I thought you'd probably be glad to get out of it this time."

"Well, you tell him that you and I are going to that dance together same as always, see?"

"But you know how he acts when he doesn't get his way." Blanche looked worried.

"Well, then, leave it to me. I'll tell him."

A short time afterward he marched to the Norcross house prepared for an unpleasant argument, but Ray gave in so gracefully that Alan was completely disarmed, and when he left he was half ashamed of the brusque manner in which he had opened the conversation. You could never tell about Ray. There was

no system by which you could anticipate what he would do. Though he accepted the defeat with apparent amiability so far as Alan was concerned, it became evident at the dancing class that he was angry with Blanche.

Equally rapid, however, was his recovery from this anger; before the Christmas holidays, he seemed to have forgotten all about it, and at such of Miss Lightner's classes as she was able to attend, danced with her more than with anybody else except Leta Purnell, who for a time interested him. But he quickly tired of Leta. "The other night when I was there, her mother had her recite," he told Alan with a sardonic grin. "Her father stood in front of the parlour mirror and used a pocket comb, and they all talked about Des Moines until I thought I'd throw a fit." Thereafter he took to twitting Leta about Des Moines, calling the attention of the other young people to her habitual insistence on the virtues of her native town.

The entire Wheelock family was to go on Christmas Eve to see Joseph Jefferson in "Rip Van Winkle," and Martha, when she went to get the tickets, bought an extra seat in the hope that Blanche could occupy it; but when Alan went over to invite her, he learned that she had already accepted a like invitation for the same evening from Mrs. Norcross.

His aunt told him he might invite whomever he chose in Blanche's place, but through indifference he let the matter drift until a few days before Christmas, when she insisted upon his making up his mind.

"I owe Leta a party," he said, "so I guess I may as well ask her."

"I could just hug you for asking me!" Leta cried, when he invited her. She was standing close to him, and her eyes were sparkling. He had never realized before how pretty she was.

"Of course, I know you asked Blanche first," she went on, "but that doesn't make a particle of difference to me. I'd love to go."

Her silk sleeve brushed his arm. He wished to touch her, and was wondering whether she would be angry if he did, when, hearing her mother's step on the stairs, Leta drew away.

"How do you do, Alan!" said Mrs. Purnell, entering the room, and for no reason at all he blushed and stammered, as he tried to explain why he had come. Leta must have perceived his confusion, for she came to his aid, diverting her mother's attention with a swift flow of chatter: "Isn't it sweet of him to ask me! There's nothing I've been wanting so much to see! Just think, Mother! Joseph Jefferson!"

On Christmas Eve, Leta, wearing a becoming dress of blue velvet and a plumed hat to match, came for early supper with the Wheelocks. Alan was proud of her as, with his grandfather, his father, and his aunt, they started toward the suburban station. Mr. and Mrs. Norcross were already awaiting the train with Ray, Blanche, Marie Hayes, and Grant, but the two parties avoided contact, and when the train came, they got into different cars.

From the Randolph Street station, Alan and Leta walked beside Zenas Wheelock, who told them of the

first theatre in Chicago, the Rialto, formerly an auction room, where this same Joseph Jefferson, then a child of nine, played in a company with his father and his mother.

"In those days," said Mr. Wheelock, "the curtain rose at seven. The play was usually followed by a farce which sometimes lasted until midnight, and comic songs were sung during the intermissions. We were very proud of our first theatre. On the curtain was painted a medallion of Shakespeare, and underneath it the quotation, 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin'; but nobody appeared to see any connection between that adage and the fact that Shakespeare looked as if he had a stomach-ache.

"I knew Jefferson's father," he went on, "and he told me about their trip West by way of the Erie Canal, stopping to play in various cities on the way. From Buffalo they came by steamer to Chicago, and after leaving here they travelled over the prairie in open wagons, and up the frozen Mississippi on sledges."

When they were seated in the theatre, Alan began covertly to look for Blanche, but he could not locate her. The auditorium filled rapidly, and the orchestra had just begun to play when Leta, apparently divining his thoughts, touched him on the arm, saying: "There they are."

Looking in the direction indicated by her eyes, Alan saw the Norcross party entering a box. There was a little flurry as they settled themselves, Blanche at the front with Ray at her side, leaning over her shoulder, whispering and laughing. Stabbed by a

pang of jealousy, Alan looked away, but he could not keep his eyes from returning to the box, and when the footlights went on they cast a glow upon Blanche's face, making every change of expression visible.

The curtain rose, and the play began; but Alan was only half aware of the proceedings on the stage, and even when he fixed his gaze determinedly on Jefferson, his thoughts would wander to the box, and presently his eyes would follow. What was it Ray said to her, just then, that made her smile? What were they whispering about? What was she thinking? Was she as happy as she looked, and if so, was it because Ray was with her? Ray always did things with a flourish. It was just like him to have Blanche in a box instead of the parquet.

Again Leta seemed to read his mind, for she leaned over and whispered:

"Anyway, we can see better from here."

He mustered a smile, but took little comfort from the thought.

"I sat in a box once," she continued, "and you can see all kinds of things you aren't meant to. I'm glad I'm not up there with them. I'd rather be here with you."

It was sweet to hear her say that. A warm flood of gratitude suffused him, and he turned and looked at her, hoping she would understand. The auditorium was dark; people sitting a few seats away were vague shadows; but he could see Leta's face.

"Never mind!" she whispered, and he felt her fingers creep into his.

He clung to them until the intermission, and when

at the beginning of the second act their hands met again, it was his that sought out hers. During the rest of the play he never glanced toward the box. What did he care now? His eyes, when they left the stage, would turn to Leta, and she would smile and press his hand.

CHAPTER XVI

LARGELY through Shire's efforts, the additional capital required by the quarry company in which Luke Holden was interested had been found; nevertheless, the beginning of the New Year saw the finances of the corporation in worse condition than before.

Though Blanche was almost eighteen, and would in three years inherit the few thousand dollars left her by her mother, Luke, who had charge of the estate, never spoke to her about it, nor about his own affairs; but Blanche had overheard enough of his talks with Florence to be aware of his difficulties, and she was not surprised when one March evening he came home looking more haggard than usual and announced the failure of the company.

"You'll get some of your money back, won't you, when things are settled up?" Florence asked him.

Gloomily he shook his head.

"Did Papa lose what he put in, too?"

"No, I did. He lent it to me."

"Well, I'm sure he'll be nice about it," Florence said.

"Oh, very nice!" he returned ironically. "I'm giving him seven per cent. interest, and he has my house and lot for security."

When, one snowy evening a few days later, Luke came home with the announcement that he intended to take Florence and the baby South for several months, Blanche was astonished. Succeeding immediately upon a heavy loss, a long vacation did not seem consistent, especially in a man who cared as much for money as he did; but Blanche had discovered before this that the world is a strange place and that the ways of man are paradoxical, so she did not waste time in puzzling over the matter.

The baby, unaccustomed to being cared for by Florence, would miss her, Blanche reflected, and certainly she would miss the baby. He would soon be three; ever since he was born she had been his nurse, and she knew the profound love that comes of service given. She tried, however, to console herself by thinking of the happy hours she would spend with Martha Wheelock, to whom, of course, she would go, as usual; nor did she learn until the day before her father and Florence were to depart that they had other plans for her.

It was Florence who told her. Blanche had put the baby in his crib and was folding dresses preparatory to moving, when her stepmother, partly clothed, came into the room and asked what she was doing.

"Getting ready to go next door."

"You're not going to the Wheelocks'," Florence informed her.

"I'm not?"

"No, you're going to Mamma."

"But your mother doesn't like me."

"Well," returned Florence coolly, "we've asked

her, and she says she'll take you this time. Come and help me lace my corset, will you?"

Blanche moved toward her.

"But, Florence——"

"Listen," the other broke in, handing her the ends of the long corset laces, "there isn't going to be any argument about this. You'll do what your father says—and he says you're *not* to go to the Wheelocks' and you *are* to go to Mamma." Having delivered this ultimatum, she raised her chest, compressed her waist with encircling fingers, and in a breathless tone commanded: "Now—pull!"

When Martha Wheelock heard the news, she was perplexed and disappointed, but there was one person who was pleased. Ray Norcross was glad that Blanche was going to the Shires'. Though he knew the members of the Wheelock family, and though his relations with Alan continued, outwardly at least, to be amicable, he sensed in the Wheelocks a certain lack of cordiality which would have made it awkward for him to see Blanche as often as he wished, had she remained for a long time their guest. Florence, he knew, liked him; she had told him so; and as they became better acquainted, had added a suffix to his name, calling him, familiarly, "Raydy." At the Holdens' house he had occasionally met Mrs. Shire, and luckily had flattered her, saying she didn't look old enough to be Florence's mother. He would be welcome there.

"Of course, I'm sorry you're disappointed," he said to Blanche when, meeting him that afternoon, she told him where she was to go, "but as far as

I'm concerned, I'm glad. I imagine the Wheellocks haven't much use for me, but I get on famously with Mrs. Shire."

"Well, I'm going to *try* to," she told him.

"It's easy enough to do," he assured her with a reminiscent smile. "The old girl loves to be jollied along."

"I'm afraid I'm not very good at jollying."

"Then you ought to read Chesterfield. My father is pretty smooth—architects have to be—and when he gave me Chesterfield to read, I saw where he got a lot of his ideas about handling people."

"But," she asked, "doesn't it make you sort of uncomfortable to say things you don't mean?"

"Not a bit. It's fun to say things you don't mean and see how people act, and sometimes it's fun to say things you do mean and have them wonder whether you mean them or not. You see," he went on, "I'm going to be an author, and authors have to study human nature. You can't write about the human animal unless you understand him."

"I suppose that's true," she mused aloud.

Next day Luke, Florence, and the baby left for the South, and that evening in her room at the Shires', Blanche tried to bury herself in her school work and forget her loneliness; but she felt strange and restless, and her thoughts kept turning hungrily to the baby and to their room at home. This room that Mrs. Shire had given her was twice as large as her room in her father's house and she supposed most people would think it nicer, but she didn't like the reddish-pink of the walls, or the green velure curtains at the

windows, or the carved golden-oak furniture, or even the chandelier with its three glittering bulbs—though she knew that Mr. Shire had recently installed electric light at great expense because it was the very latest thing.

The room felt cold. She moved over and laid her hand on the gilded radiator by the window to assure herself that the steam was on. Radiators were ugly things, but they were better than hot-air because they sent the heat where you wanted it to go. Finding the warmth agreeable, she stood there for a time looking out upon the blustering night.

By day the lake was visible from this window, but now she only felt it out there in the darkness, cold and ominous, lashed by a gale that came in savage gusts, pelting the windowpane with icy particles. The iron street lamp on the corner stood like a sentinel frozen at his post, with the snow drifting about his knees. Across the narrow circle of light, flakes small and hard as grains of rice went swirling and instantly were lost in the black, angry night. . . . No doubt the baby was now asleep in his warm Pullman berth. Blanche had never slept in a Pullman. She wondered what it was like. She'd enjoy traveling. . . . Palm trees . . .

Her reverie was interrupted by Robert, the coloured butler, announcing that Ray was downstairs.

Blanche looked at the clock. "Why, it's nearly ten," she said.

"Young gemman say he very sorry, but he want to see you most particular," explained the Negro, with

an apologetic little smile, and she followed him down.

Ray was standing near the suit of armour in the oaken hall, his ulster wet with melting snow. On sight of her, he slipped out of the heavy garment and flung it over the arms of a chair.

"I've got some wonderful news," he cried, "and I couldn't wait to tell you." As she led the way to the parlour, he ran on: "I wouldn't be surprised if I broke into print pretty soon. Shelley published a book of poems while he was still at Eton, you know, and I believe that if a man has the gift, things are bound to work around so that he gets a chance to express what's in him. I went out to the World's Fair grounds this afternoon to watch them working on the buildings, and entirely by chance I got talking to a man who turned out to be an editor. I showed him the first verse of a poem I happened to have with me, and he said he might use it in his magazine. Isn't that great?"

"Splendid! What magazine is it?"

"It's called *Twilight*," he replied as they sat down. "It's a new magazine and this man—Bosworth's his name—is very artistic. I've been working on the poem this evening, and I hope to take it to him in a day or two."

"What's it about?"

"I wasn't going to tell you until it's done," he said, "but—well, it's about you." He was watching her intently.

"About *me*?" She was half incredulous. "Why, what could you possibly——"

"I have it here—what there is of it," he broke in, drawing from his pocket a sheet of yellow paper.

"Oh, read it to me!"

"I call it 'To Blanche,'" he announced, unfolding the paper, and slowly he read:

"Fragile, fine, and lily-fair,
Lightly tripping down the stair,
Comes serene with queenly air,
My Lady Blanche.

"Eyes that sparkle like the night,
Starred with constellations bright,
Soft and deep and all alight,
My Lady Blanche.

"Blooms from which the wild bee sips
Suffer a complete eclipse
When compared with your sweet lips,
My Lady Blanche."

"Oh, it's lovely!" she murmured.

"A man writes best when he feels most deeply," he said in a low voice, whereat Blanche flushed and looked away. "You don't mind my saying that?"

Fingering the fringe of a green velvet table cover, she shook her head.

"Blanche!" He seized her hand, lifted it to his lips and kissed it; then dropping it abruptly, leaped to his feet and moved with rapid steps to the hall.

Disturbed, she hastened after him, asking:

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Don't ask me!" He snatched his hat and ulster from the chair, opened the front door and rushed down the steps.

"Ray!" she called after him. "Ray, put on your coat!"

On the sidewalk, he paused for an instant, and waving the garment like a banner, looked back at her; then, leaning into the storm, he was gone.

With the cold wind beating about her, she stood in the doorway, staring at the place where he had been. How strange of him to have come so late and to have rushed away like that! And going out into the storm without his coat—it was madness!

Chilled, she turned back to the hall and closed the door. There was but one way to explain it. Ray must be, as his mother so often said, a genius. He always smiled deprecatingly when he heard her make the declaration, but it must be true. No one but a genius would have acted like that.

"Why, he might get lung fever!" she told herself with a little shudder, as she started slowly up the stairs.

Reaching the landing, she paused, listening to the tempest as it battled with the windowpanes.

"Yes," she said to herself, visioning the brilliance of his dark eyes and the quick play of expression over his face, "that must be it. He's a genius. He needs somebody to look after him."

CHAPTER XVII

AWAKENED next morning by the whistling of the gale and the volleying of sleet against the windows, Blanche was for a moment startled by the strangeness of the room, but the raw pink walls and violent green draperies, cold in the early light, promptly told her where she was. For three months she must stay here. Three months without the baby. She could picture him this morning in his berth, fascinated by the rocking of the car and by the scenery whirling past. What did he see from the window, she wondered. Were they far enough south to have run into sunshine and warm weather? A vision of palm trees on a golden shore glowed upon the curtain of her mind, and with the swiftness of a changing lantern slide was gone, giving place to a picture of Ray as she had seen him last night, waving his coat in the icy wind.

As she dressed, she continued to think of Ray, hoping the mad performance had not made him ill. She wished she could find out; and a glow of happiness came over her as suddenly she realized that she could. Why, of course! The Norcrosses, no less up-to-date than the Shires, though less talkative about it, had recently installed a telephone. She hastened down to the coat room, consulted the little telephone book, cranked the fantastic instrument, and

gave the number to the operator. The servant who answered said she wasn't sure whether Mr. Ray was up yet; while she went to inquire, Blanche waited; then came Ray's voice over the electric wire.

"I just wanted to find out if you are all right," she explained.

He gave a little laugh. "I haven't been awake long enough to find out. Why shouldn't I be all right?"

"Rushing off without putting on your coat—it worried me."

"Worry about me a lot, you sweet thing!" he cried gaily. "I love it! Seeing you last night was just what I needed. It was an inspiration to me! Do you realize you were acting out my poem as you came down?" And without waiting for an answer he quoted:

"Lightly tripping down the stair,
Comes serene with queenly air,
My Lady Blanche.

"I sat up most of the night and finished the poem," he continued, "and to-day I'm going to take it down to Mr. Bosworth."

"Oh, I shouldn't have disturbed you so early!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, you should! Any time's a good time to hear from you. Do you know you've got a perfectly lovely voice? I used to know an English girl that had one of those 'cello voices, and I was crazy about her—that is, for a while." He paused and when she

did not speak, added significantly: "I guess you know who I'm crazy about now, don't you?"

She felt herself blushing and did not know what to say.

"Well, don't you?" he demanded. But at this juncture, the coat-room door suddenly opened and Mr. Shire bustled in.

"Oh," he said, "you're here, are you? I was wondering where you were. Your breakfast's getting cold."

Thinking he had come for his coat and hat and would quickly depart, she waited, but he continued:

"Sorry to interrupt. I have to telephone my office."

Intending to explain to Ray, Blanche turned to the instrument, but as she opened her lips, she heard his voice.

"What's the matter?" he demanded in an irritated tone.

Mr. Shire had taken his overcoat from a hook, and Blanche felt it brushing against her back as he struggled into it. "I'm in a hurry," he announced crisply over his shoulder, and simultaneously the receiver spoke.

"Look here, I haven't had my coffee yet! Do you expect me to stand here like this all morning? Are you dumb?" And before she could answer, the jingle of the telephone bell told her Ray had rung off.

He was annoyed with her. Naturally, he couldn't understand. She had stood there like a ninny. Why hadn't she quickly told him that Mr. Shire was waiting? It was stupid of her, but when it came to

making explanations, she was always stupid. She hated explanations, and knowing that the aversion often made things more difficult for her in the end, she had tried to overcome it, but in vain. Now, unless she chanced to meet Ray, she would have to ring him up again or else write him a note, and that would seem, somehow, to lend undue importance to the episode.

She had no appetite for breakfast, and after drinking her coffee put on her hat and coat, took up her books, and left the house. Though it had stopped snowing, the wind continued to howl in from the lake, blowing sleet into her face and tussling with her as she turned the corner; but by the time she reached school it had abated. During the morning the sun appeared and the classroom became uncomfortably warm. Registers were closed and windows lowered; from outside came a steady sound of dripping from eaves and cornices, and when school let out, the gutters were running with slush and little lakes had formed at the street-crossings. In the space of a few hours the fickle Chicago climate had turned winter into spring.

That afternoon Blanche sat close to her bedroom window, her eyes frequently turning from her school-book to the street. Ray had said he was going to take his poem downtown to-day, and she hoped to intercept him on his way to or from the station; but darkness fell without her catching sight of him. She wondered what the editor had said about the poem and if Ray would let her know. Throughout the evening she was on the alert for the ring of the tele-

phone or the doorbell, but neither of them sounded, so before going to bed she wrote him a note of explanation. Next morning, however, she decided not to send it; surely she would meet him somewhere, and even if she didn't, she would see him on Saturday night, for they had an engagement to go together to the amateur dramatics at the club.

Saturday night arrived without her having heard from him. After supper she dressed and sat waiting in her room, where presently came to her the booming note of the hall clock striking eight. He ought to be here now. The minutes dragged by. At a quarter past eight, she started toward the stairs, thinking to be ready on the instant he should come, but at the head of the flight she stopped, arrested by the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Shire floating up from below. She didn't want to wait down there with them. It would make her too ridiculous if—for the first time she acknowledged to herself the fear that had been lurking in the background of her mind—if Ray should fail her.

Returning to her room, she paced the floor, her ears straining for the first sound of the doorbell. By now the audience would be assembling at the club and soon the curtain would go up. They would be late. Even if he should come at once, they would be late. Perhaps he was running up the steps at this instant. Perhaps he was reaching for the bell. But the bell did not ring, and suddenly she knew Ray wasn't coming for her. He was angrier than she had allowed herself to believe. She should have sent that letter! Oh, dear, why hadn't she sent it right away!

Had he stayed at home to-night, she wondered, or gone to the dramatics? Maybe he had taken someone else. She wished she knew. She wished she knew where he was, what he was doing.

If she'd known Ray wasn't coming, she could have asked to go with the Wheelocks. He might have let her know! Perhaps Aunt Martha wasn't going, though, and in that case Alan would have felt he had to take her. She wouldn't want to ask that of him—not as things stood now.

As things stood now—what exactly did she mean? How did things stand now? Sensible of a change in her relations with Alan, she had not before attempted to define it. Had it been an abrupt change, like this misunderstanding with Ray, she would have been compelled to face it and worry about it; but it had developed gradually, almost imperceptibly, like the turning of the seasons. The change hadn't affected their friendship, she told herself. Their friendship didn't depend upon their continually seeing each other; it was too old and deep for that; they always resumed where they left off, however wide the gap between their meetings; but nowadays the gaps were often great.

Of course, that was due partly to the fact that Alan had been working so hard. By tutoring during the summer, he had got into Northwestern University a year ahead of his class at Hyde Park High School, and as the trip from Oakland to Evanston took nearly two hours, he lived part of the time at a fraternity house out there, coming home only two nights a week. Besides, he was taking extra courses to fit

himself for business, and he didn't go out as a rule except on Saturday nights, when usually he took Leta somewhere.

But not to-night. Leta had a part in the dramatics and had to be at the club an hour ahead of time. Alan would be free, and Blanche felt sure he wouldn't mind taking her. In fact, when she last saw him, a week ago, he had spoken of old times, and said he wished they met more frequently. If, in the circumstances, Alan should take her, Blanche didn't think Leta would mind. Plainly Leta was very fond of Alan, but she wasn't of a jealous disposition, and she knew—so Blanche felt—that she and Alan were merely childhood friends.

Leta's mother might not like it, though. She was absurdly jealous for her daughter and sometimes showed it plainly. You could always tell what Mrs. Purnell was thinking, because she always talked about it. Lately she had talked of Alan almost as much as she talked of Leta, and she always spoke of him with a proprietary air, telling with a kind of boastfulness how ambitious he was, and prophesying that he would make a big success in business. Blanche wondered if Alan would some day marry Leta. They were awfully young to be thinking of anything like that. She and Leta were the same age—eighteen—and Alan was only a year older; but Ray, who was twenty-one and was terribly clever at seeing through things, insisted that Mrs. Purnell had such a match in mind. He was always poking fun at the Purnells. At Alan, too, for that matter, and at almost everybody else. Blanche often

wished he would be more considerate of people's feelings. She wished he wouldn't call Alan "Old Sobersides" and that he wouldn't burlesque Leta's recitations. She was sure they didn't like it.

Had Ray been less critical, she might have seen more of Alan in the last two years. When Ray first moved into the neighbourhood, the two boys had seemed to be congenial, but without any definite break, they had drifted apart, and in that drift she had somehow been involved. That was really the beginning of it, she saw, as she looked back. From the time of Ray's arrival, her relations with Alan had begun to alter.

The fact that Ray was two years older than Alan made him feel superior, she supposed, and his having inherited money from his father's Spanish relatives no doubt made a difference, too. You could see that he felt very independent now that the money was in his hands. Blanche had tried to get him to stop lording it over Alan, but Ray had only laughed at her and said it would do Alan good to be kept in his place—that he mustn't be allowed to think too well of himself just because he was going to the university now.

It was hard to manage Ray when he got a notion like that. He was so headstrong, so determined. Almost invariably he had his own way. It hadn't taken him long, after he moved into the neighbourhood, so to re-arrange things that he, instead of Alan, was escorting her to parties. Almost before she knew it, the change had been effected, and Alan was taking Leta instead. Again she found herself

wondering how much Alan cared for Leta. Was he falling in love with her?

Love! How could people know if they were in love? Did they realize it the same as they realized they were hungry or thirsty? How did it affect them? Did they just keep thinking of the one they were in love with, wanting to see him, wanting to hear from him?

She went to her table, took from the drawer the note she had written Ray, and read it over. It struck her as stiff and formal, so she rewrote it. Somehow, it was harder to write to Ray than to other people; he was so clever that you were always a little afraid of what he might think. She wasn't sure that her second letter was an improvement on the first. How she wished she had sent the first one right away! Because now her letter wouldn't reach him until Monday morning.

That night she had difficulty in getting to sleep, and at dawn she suddenly woke, possessed by the idea that she had heard Ray calling her. So strong was the illusion that she had an impulse to get up and look out of the open window whence the voice had seemed to come, but she dissuaded herself. What foolishness! Of course he couldn't possibly be out there at such an hour. She had been dreaming.

Nevertheless, she could not get back to sleep. Until broad daylight came, she lay revolving in her mind ideas for improving the letter, but by the time she had risen and dressed, they were discarded, and after breakfast she walked down to the post office

and dropped the missive into the brass-rimmed slot.

Well, it was gone. Perhaps it wasn't right, but it was gone.

In the afternoon, she went for a walk, but though the day was springlike, she soon returned, and ascending to her room, sat down with a book. Thoughts of Ray kept coming between her and the pages. When would she see him again? Would the letter make things right? That night, as on the night before, she was for a long time sleepless, and her first thought next morning was that to-day he would receive her letter.

What would he do? Would he telephone before she went to school? She delayed as long as possible, but no message came, so she put on her hat and coat and hastened out into the mild spring air.

Unlike the other residences of the Shire block, that of the owner was entered from the side street, and the avenue upon which it faced was not visible from the front door. Moving down the steps, Blanche heard the sound of hammering, and as she rounded the corner, she was startled to discover signs of unwonted activity at a point that seemed to be directly in front of her father's house. Near the curb carpenters were erecting a rough shed, and workmen were tossing planks out of a wagon.

What could it mean? As she hurried forward, a second work wagon lumbered up, and turning, drove over the curb, over the sidewalk, and into the front yard.

They had torn down the iron fence! Half of it

was gone, and the soft earth of the side yard was rutted with wheel tracks. They were digging—digging up her mother's garden!

Near the shed a workman was slamming the planks into a pile.

"What's this digging for?" she demanded of him breathlessly.

"Flats," he replied, without looking at her.

She gasped.

"Why, you can't do that!"

The workman straightened up, drew from his pocket a sulphur match, struck it on the leg of his overalls, and having shielded it with his hands until the blue flame disappeared, relighted his corn-cob pipe. Apparently the pipe was clogged. He pulled at it, tamped the burning tobacco with a leathery thumb, spat, and looked at her gravely, saying: "I'm just the foreman."

"Well, it's all a mistake! My father's away. Who told you to do it?"

He mentioned a name she had never heard.

"It's a mistake!" she repeated vehemently. "You must stop until I find out about it!" Turning, she ran to the Wheelock house.

As the front door was on the latch, she entered the hall, and hearing voices, advanced swiftly into the library, where she found Zenas Wheelock, Harris, and Martha.

"Oh, Grandpa Wheelock!" she cried. "Have you seen what they're doing?"

The old man, pacing the floor, turned toward her.

"Yes, my dear."

"Oh, make them stop!"

"I wish I could."

"But it's a mistake! I told the man it was a mistake. I told him to stop. Maybe he won't stop for me, but he will for you!" She advanced and seized his arm. "Come! Tell him!"

Zenas Wheelock patted her shoulder and Martha spoke.

"I'm afraid it's not a mistake, dear," she said.

"But, Aunt Martha—it *must* be! The man says it's a flat-building. Father couldn't do such a thing! He *couldn't*!"

There was a moment's silence.

"I understand," said the old man, "that your father has had financial reverses."

"Did he tell you he was going to do it?"

"No."

"He didn't tell me, either. I don't believe he knows a thing about it! Why, they've torn out Mother's rose bushes! And the only reason you sold the land was so she could have a garden. She told me so."

"Evidently," he replied, "your father has forgotten."

"Remind him, then! Remind him!"

"Unfortunately our agreement was not in writing," answered Zenas Wheelock. "You mustn't disturb yourself, my dear, for there is nothing you can do."

"Yes," added Martha in a soothing tone, "if I were you, dear, I would just go to school and try not to think about it. We know how you *must* feel,

but I'm afraid it's just one of those things that can't be helped. We must accept it the best we can."

Blanche's eyes suddenly filled. Through the blur of tears she saw Martha set her work-basket on the table, rise, and come quickly toward her.

"You know how much we all love you, Blanche. This doesn't make the least difference about that," she said, embracing her.

"I know, but—but I must try to stop it!" Blanche had been trying to keep herself in hand, but this tenderness was more than she could bear. Instead of making things easier for the Wheelocks, she was making them harder—making them worry about her in addition to their other worries. If she remained here she would break down, and that would upset them more than ever. She threw her arms about Martha, clung to her for an instant, and turning, rushed from the house.

Next door, the men had taken the horses from the wagons and hitched them to scrapers. The drivers were shouting at the animals, and as Blanche passed out of the Wheelocks' gate, she was startled by the sharp crack of a whip. She must hurry! Formulating in her mind a message to her father, she sped with swift steps toward the Corners.

At the telegraph office she wrote the dispatch, and after learning from the clerk that at best she must wait two hours for a reply, she started back. Drawing near the house, she observed Mrs. Shire's victoria standing at the carriage block, and as she mounted the steps, that lady emerged from the door.

"Why aren't you in school?" she demanded.

Blanche started to explain, but the other quickly understood and cut her off.

"Well," she said impatiently, "what if they *are* going to build flats? What earthly business is it of yours?"

"I don't believe Father knows about it! He couldn't——"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Mrs. Shire swept magnificently down the steps, and entering the carriage added over her shoulder: "You'd better get to school, that's what *you'd* better do!"

As the glistening vehicle drove away, Blanche moved into the house. The slow tick of the oak clock seemed to accentuate the silence of the hall, and her footsteps echoed loudly as she crossed the hardwood floor. Having informed Robert that she was awaiting a message, she went to her room and lay down.

Did her father know? They all seemed to think so. She couldn't believe it, though—not yet. The flats would destroy Grandpa Wheelock's lindens and cut off his light. Her father would never have agreed to such a thing!

And the garden!

Always when Blanche summoned to mind the picture of her mother, she saw her among the roses with their green lacquered leaves and buds of ivory and coral. To visit the garden, even in the neglected state into which it had fallen, gave her invariably a feeling of serenity, a sense of nearness to her mother, whose spirit seemed to hover there like a fragrance. And now the ground was slashed and mangled; the

sandy subsoil, scraped up by the scoops, was piled in ragged mounds, and in a heap against the gate communicating with the Wheelocks' yard the up-torn rose bushes lay dying.

No, he would never have allowed it if he knew!

The morning dragged away; in the early afternoon she went again to the telegraph office, but no answer had come. Perhaps her father had been out when her message arrived. She returned to the house. In the late afternoon, she heard Mrs. Shire come in, and at dusk the slam of the front door and a booming voice in the lower hall told her that Mr. Shire had reached home. Presently he called her, and when she went downstairs, she found him with his wife in the parlour.

"I got a wire from Florence this afternoon," he began, "and she tells me—" The cigar he was smoking was evidently cracked, for he paused to lick the unfurled wrapper and press it into place—"she tells me you've been bothering your father about the new building. I'm in complete charge. What is it you want to find out?"

"Does Father know about it?"

Shire grinned and replied with a question.

"Is it your notion that folks go sticking up buildings without the owner of the property knowing?"

"I told you this morning that he knew!" sharply interjected Mrs. Shire.

"Oh, Mr. Shire!" Blanche strove to control her voice. "Won't you please stop it?"

He stood looking at her quizzically.

"You must!" she burst out. "You must!"

"Oh, must I?" He was smiling.

"Yes, on account of Grandpa Wheelock!"

"So the Wheelocks put you up to this?" Mrs. Shire snapped out.

"No, but Father promised them the land would always be a garden." The words were hardly out of her mouth when Mrs. Shire turned to her husband, insisting:

"See? The Wheelocks *did* put her up to it, William!"

"I tell you they didn't!" Blanche's hands were shaking, and she clasped them behind her back.

"Were you over there this morning?" asked Shire shrewdly; and upon her assenting, he continued: "Well, if they didn't put you up to it, where did you get the idea there was some kind of agreement?"

"Mother told me."

"Oh." Shire stepped slowly to the window, dropped his cigar into a jardinière, and for a moment stared at it abstractedly. He was frowning when he turned to her again. "This is a matter of business," he said slowly, "and you'd just better keep out of it! You didn't admit anything to the Wheelocks, did you?" His eyes were fixed intently on her face.

"I told them just what I've told you."

"You did, did you?" He thrust his head forward. "Well, what did they say?"

"They said Father must have forgotten the agreement, and—and——" As she hesitated, Mrs. Shire cut in with:

"She's holding something back!"

"They told me they didn't think I could do anything," Blanche finished.

In a visible expression of relief, Shire's body relaxed. Moving to a chair, he sat down, and when again he addressed her, it was in a milder tone.

"If you haven't done any harm so far," he announced, "it's just bull-headed luck, that's all it is. Let me tell you, people can get themselves into a peck of trouble blabbing about what isn't any of their business."

"But it *is* my business!" she cried. "Grandpa Wheelock trusted Father, and for Father to turn around and do a thing like this is"—she groped for the word—"it's disgraceful!"

Mrs. Shire raised her hands and let them fall upon the arms of her chair in a gesture of limp horror.

"Disgraceful?" she repeated. "A fine word for you to be using! The disgraceful thing is for you to talk that way about your father—and about Mr. Shire, too, when this very minute you're indebted to him for the roof over your head! Goodness knows you wouldn't be here if your father hadn't practically insisted on our taking you!"

Suddenly Blanche understood. She had been groping in darkness, but Mrs. Shire had turned on the light. It was true! Her father had planned it—that was why he had obliged her to come here! Of course, he couldn't send her to the Wheelocks, when he was going to do a thing like that!

But the Wheelocks still loved her. She could leave the Shires and go to them. At the thought her spirits soared, but only momentarily, for almost

at once she realized that she could not possibly go to the Wheelocks' now. How could she bear to look out from their house on the desecrated garden, with the walls of the flat-building rising, rising, day by day, to darken Grandpa Wheelock's windows and cast a shadow over his life? Her father's action had cut her off from that refuge and made her a prisoner here. Not until now had she fully realized the helplessness of her position; and as the sense of it swept over her, she turned and, weeping, hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

LYING on her bed in the dark that evening, Blanche turned the situation over in her mind. She could help neither the Wheelocks nor herself. She had been hammering her head against a stone wall, and her one desire now was to get away. She could no longer bear it here. She would get out and go to work. If she couldn't get a place in an office or a store, she could at least take care of children. Maybe Colonel Burchard would help her to get started, or she could advertise in the papers.

"Young girl, eighteen, would like"—no, "seeks"—they charged by the line. And you didn't need to put in "young" if you said "girl" and "eighteen"—"seeks position as—as——" It made it rather complicated when you didn't know just what sort of position you were seeking.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Robert knocking at her door with the announcement that Ray was downstairs.

Ray! Under the stress of to-day's events, worries about Ray had ceased to occupy the foreground of her mind, but now she was again aware of a great eagerness to see him. He must have forgiven her. He wouldn't be here if he hadn't. She could ask his advice. The electric light half blinded her as she switched it on, but soon her eyes became accus-

tomed to it, and having fixed her hair, she hurried down.

As she neared the bottom of the flight, he advanced to meet her, saying: "You're a nice one! Here I've been sick for nearly a week and I never heard a word from you until to-day." Then as he saw her face: "Why, how tired you look!"

"Let's go for a walk. I want to talk to you."

"Is anything wrong?"

She warned him in a low voice to say no more until they were outside, and having got her hat and coat, rejoined him at the door.

The night into which they stepped was dark, and dampness rising from the ground filled the air with an earthy smell. Rounding the corner, they moved up the block, assailed at intervals by nomadic gusts of wind which, after snatching with soft fingers at their coats, would dart away to nocturnal hiding places, like children enticing to pursuit.

"What's the matter, Blanche?"

"Oh, everything!"

"No," he said, "not everything, for we're together again. You can't imagine how I've missed you!"

"Have you? I thought you were angry with me for being so stupid."

"Don't call yourself stupid; you're anything but that."

"But you were angry—I know you were."

"Well, that's long ago," he evaded, "and as I told you, I wasn't well."

"I'm awfully sorry."

Discerning in the dimness the outlines of the shed

in front of her father's house, she cut obliquely over the grass plot, saying: "Let's cross the street." She wasn't ready to talk yet; she wanted to sit down with him quietly before beginning, and with a fear that, dark as it was, he might notice the shed and ask questions, she engaged him with another topic.

"What about your poem? Did the editor like it?"

"Oh—that." Ray spoke as one who recalls with difficulty an insignificant affair of long ago. "To tell the truth, I'm rather disappointed in Bosworth; he isn't nearly as artistic as I thought him at first. However, he's a kind soul. He says Chicago's no place for a writer, and he's offered me letters of introduction to prominent literary people—Frank R. Stockton, Archibald Clavering Gunter, F. Marion Crawford, and such. Crawford lives mostly in Italy, but I hope it won't be too long before I get over there again, and it will be rather nice to meet the man who wrote 'Saracinesca' and 'A Cigarette Maker's Romance.'"

"Wonderful!"

"Men like that can help a fellow, too," he went on. "You mark my words, once I get back East again, it won't be long before I begin to make a reputation."

"I'm sure it won't."

With an impulsive movement he locked his arm in hers, saying:

"It's lovely to hear you say that!"

At the corner they turned toward the lake, and when they reached the stone wall at the foot of the street, Ray lifted her to a seat on the cap and

swung himself up beside her. In the darkness, the railroad was invisible, but its path along the curving shore was traced in signal lights, ruby, emerald, and topaz: a jewelled border at the hem of a black velvet robe; for to-night this lake of many moods was coy and mysterious, a fair masquerader in a sable domino, unseen, yet betrayed at each stealthy step by the frou-frou of her silken skirts.

A sense of relief had begun to creep over Blanche as she left the Shires' house; and now, sitting with Ray in the darkness, lulled by the rhythmical wash of the waves against the breakwater, she felt almost happy. It was lovely just to be there with someone who was kind.

"It's queer," he said, "how you feel the openness of that black space out there, when you can't see it. It's the same on a moonless night in the desert. After all, you can't ever see the bigness of anything that's really big. You have to imagine it."

"I wish I were out there in a boat," she told him.

"Not without me, I hope? I wouldn't let you go without me!" She was silent, and he went on:

"While we're imagining things, let's make them worth while. Our boat will be a galleon—or would you rather have a beautiful white yacht—a steam yacht that can take you anywhere?"

"A galleon," she said.

"Well, then, the hull is all carved and gilded, and the sails are of crimson silk, and there are crimson cushions where you recline, attended by your maidens. Of course, I'm the captain. I wear a slashed doublet and a plumed hat, and I regret to say,

Blanche, that I suspect we've been pirates at one time or another, because the decks are covered with great iron-bound chests, and they're so full of gold doubloons and priceless gems that the crew can't get the lids down, and strings of diamonds and pearls are dangling out all over the place. So your maidens come and get them and festoon your hair with them; and when they've got you all fixed, I come with a golden flagon and jewelled cup, and I drop to one knee and serve you with rare old Falernian."

"What's Falernian?"

"Never mind; you'll like it! And there's another thing about our voyage that you'll like: the weather's always fine, and our sailors are picked for their voices, so they can sing to us as we cruise along."

Blanche, as she listened, had been gazing in dreamy abstraction at the headlight of an oncoming locomotive, and now, with a roar, it drew abreast of them. As the engine passed, she caught a rushing picture of the interior of the cab with the fireman bending to the swing of his heavy scoop shovel, one side of his body lost in coal-black shadow, the other daubed with burning light from the open firebox, whence a hot glare shot upward to the plume of smoke that writhed above the cars, blending with it in a soaring luminosity of gray and rose colour.

The train swept on, and as its thunder diminished to a distant hum, she heard Ray's voice again, but it was no longer the exuberant voice in which he had built up his fanciful image.

"Poor little Blanche!" he said. "Is it the flat-building? Is that what's the matter?"

"Why, how did you know?" she exclaimed.

"Heard about it first thing this morning from my grandfather. The whole neighbourhood's upset, and I knew right away you'd feel it more than anybody. Poor youngster! I wish there was something I could do to make things easier."

"There was," she told him, "and you've done it. You came to see me, and I hope you've forgiven me."

"Forgive!" he repeated. "As if there was anything you needed to be forgiven for! I'm the one that needs forgiveness. It was beastly of me not to come for you Saturday night! Perfectly beastly! I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself, and I want to confess."

"To tell the truth, I was awfully angry. You see, I hadn't had my coffee when you telephoned, and I didn't more than half know what I was doing; so when I said something to you that I thought was rather nice, and I couldn't get an answer out of you, I decided you must be trying to snub me, and I whipped myself into a perfect lather about it. Unfortunately, I do that sometimes. I suppose it's because I have such a devil of an imagination."

"Anyhow, I decided I was never going to see you again. Imagine my being such a fool! I wanted to make you just as miserable as I could, and I hoped I was doing it, but whether I was or not, I was certainly making myself miserable. The family thought I had an attack of la grippe, but that wasn't it. It was just that I was sick over you! I couldn't sleep for thinking of you! I couldn't think of anything else! I kept telling myself I would never speak to

you again, yet I felt as if I would go mad unless I could just look at you for a minute.

"Before dawn yesterday morning, I felt I couldn't stand it any longer, so I got up and dressed and went over and stood by that lamp post on the corner and looked up at your window, longing for you! And I kept thinking you'd come to the window. I knew you must be asleep, but my thoughts were pouring up there in such waves that it seemed as if they couldn't help but wake you! I don't know how long I waited there, but I was angrier than ever when I went home. It was the queerest feeling! I hated you for making me suffer so, yet at the same time I knew I loved you! One minute I'd decide to keep away from you even if it killed me, and the next I knew I couldn't—I couldn't wait—I must see you right away!"

She gave a little gasp.

"I did hear you! I woke at dawn, certain I'd heard you speak; and I wanted to go to the window, but it seemed such a crazy notion that I argued myself out of it. I've heard of such things, but I never believed in them before, did you?"

"People can't feel the way I feel about you without communicating it," he answered. "Oh, Blanche, I was standing out there wanting you the way a man dying of thirst wants water!" He seized her hand, bent over and pressed it to his forehead; then, still clinging to the hand, he quickly raised his head, exclaiming:

"Why, you're trembling!"

"I know."

"Are you still unhappy?"

"Not this instant, but it will come back."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, I've such a problem on my hands."

"Tell me." He spoke tenderly.

"I can't stand it any longer at the Shires'," she answered. "I've got to get away from there right off."

"You'll go South to your father?"

"Oh, no! I thought I'd look for work."

"Work?" he repeated in a shocked tone. "Haven't you money of your own?"

"Not till I'm twenty-one."

"Or relatives to go to?"

"No."

"But you can't go to work, Blanche! You simply can't! What could you do?"

She began to mention her plans, but he did not wait for her to finish.

"No, no!" he broke in. "You couldn't stand it! Why, as a governess you'd be practically a servant, and a store or an office—why, you simply have no idea how horrible this world is! You don't——"

"I know more about it than I did yesterday," she put in grimly.

"Yes, but a clerk! You can't be a clerk!"

"I don't see what's to prevent me."

"I will!" he cried. "Look here, Blanche—I'm twenty-one; I've got enough money to keep us awhile, and I love you! Don't you love me?" Through the darkness she was aware of his intense gaze. "Say you love me!"

Like a swallow skimming through the night, a sudden thought of Alan startled her. Strange that she should be thinking of him now! Strange, too, that at this time there should come to her the memory of an episode all but forgotten: that night in the garden when Alan came running after her as she was going home, and awkwardly thrust the friendship ring into her hand. She still had the ring. She kept it with her mother's watch in what she called her "jewellery box."

Ray's fervid pressure was hurting her hand.

"Say you love me!"

"I—I don't know," she whispered.

Sharply he drew back, but the withdrawal was like that of a wave which recedes only to come surging on again.

"Don't know!" he burst out. "Why, of course you know! Haven't you missed me? Haven't you been thinking of me all week? Weren't you miserable because I didn't come around?" And without giving her a chance to reply, he answered his own questions: "Certainly you were! You *know* you've missed me! Didn't you just tell me you woke up yesterday at dawn thinking about me? That proves it! I tell you you're just as much in love with me as I am with you! You've *got* to be! I'll *make* you!" He dropped her hand, and grasping her by the shoulders, shook her. "You've got to love me! You've *got* to! And you're *not* going to work! Never, never! You're going to marry me, Blanche—*that's* what you're going to do! We'll get married to-morrow!"

Marriage! To-morrow!

She had never thought of marriage save dimly, as something which might happen to her in a future distant and unknowable. Why, she wasn't even out of high school yet! It wasn't a year since she put up her hair, and she had never had a skirt that reached all the way to the ground.

"Oh!" she breathed, "I don't see—I don't know how——" But her faltering words were smothered against his coat.

"I'm going to get you out of here!" he rushed on exultantly. "Lord, but it'll be wonderful taking you round and showing you New York! Those lovely eyes of yours will be bigger than ever when we cross the ferry, and you see the ships moving up and down—ships from every corner of the world—and then we'll——"

"My hat!" she murmured, reaching for it.

"Oh, let it go!" he cried, and snatching the hat from her head, tossed it aside with an impatience so characteristic, and in the circumstances so droll, as to surprise Blanche into a shy little laugh.

For some mysterious reason this shy little laugh made her feel more at one with him, and with a sigh she relaxed, luxuriating in a sensation of profound contentment very restful after the strain and fatigue of this long day. Ray had found her staggering under a great burden and magically had eased the load. It was sweet to know that someone cared, sweet to feel this sense of his protectiveness.

A suburban train rattled past. When it was gone he bent and kissed her.

Only a few days ago she had been asking herself how people knew they were in love, and already the question seemed to have been answered for her. This blessed sense of peace, of trembling happiness—this must be it!

CHAPTER XIX

OPPRESSED at the moment of awakening by an obscure feeling that something was wrong, Martha Wheelock recalled quickly the circumstances of the preceding day. Already the workmen were arriving next door. Through a window opening on what had been Nannie Holden's garden, she distinctly heard the rattle and creak of wagons, the clink of harness chains and the staccato of careless talk. Hereafter, she reflected, she must keep that window closed at night, opening instead the windows overlooking the back yard. Of course that meant morning light in her eyes unless she moved her bed. She could put the head of the bed where the desk now stood, but that would take the desk away from the gas fixture, making an oil lamp necessary when she wrote at night, and the desk wasn't large enough comfortably to accommodate a lamp. Oh, well, there was always a way to fix things if you put your mind to it. Later she would see what she could do.

At breakfast her father was silent and abstracted; after luncheon she took her mending to the library, and sitting with him while he read, noticed that his eyes looked heavy; yet when presently she glanced up from her work and saw him nodding in his chair,

she was surprised. As she tiptoed over to rescue the book which was slipping from his lap, he suddenly awoke, and she knew from his puzzled frown that he was astonished and chagrined at having been caught dozing.

"Do go upstairs and take a nap," she urged.

"You *know* I never take naps, Martha." He spoke sternly, but she understood that his sternness was in reality directed toward himself.

"I know," she assented, "but after the shock of yesterday——"

"It was no particular shock," he broke in, gently perverse. "I've long been expecting something of the kind."

"Even so, it has been upsetting, and you look tired, Father."

"Tired?" With a little snort of contempt he echoed the obnoxious word. "Nonsense, Martha! Why, I could whip my weight in wildcats!"

Sad as she felt, Martha Wheelock with difficulty repressed a smile. As the word "tired" passed her lips, she had known what his reply would be. "Whip my weight in wildcats" was the invariable formula; and now, as always, it was followed by a show of briskness.

"I'm going for a good walk," he declared, rising. "I feel the need of exercise." A few moments later, he left the house, and Martha gathered up her sewing and ascended to her room, where, in her favourite low rocker beside the window, she resumed her work.

After a time, she heard her father return.

"Did you enjoy your walk, dear?" Her call to

him as he reached the head of the stairs on his way to his room was less a question than a salutation.

"Yes, yes. But it is becoming rather warm."

How often she had sat like this with her mending, listening for his return, welcoming the sound of his step on the stairs, exchanging a word of greeting with him as he passed. It was in a sense an epitome of her life—mending for them all and listening for her father. How different from the life she had dreamed for herself when as a young girl they moved out here! She glanced at the framed photograph of a young soldier on her dresser and let her eyes fall again to her work. It might have been so different had he lived. Yet what would her father and Harris and Alan have done without her? And Blanche.

She slipped her darning ball into one of Alan's socks, and finding a hole in the toe, began to mend it. Evidently, the Lord had intended her for this. Evidently, He had not meant her to have a life of her own. There had been a time when she secretly rebelled at the thought, but she had long since acquired resignation, and looking back she could not deny that in her servitude she had managed somehow to find happiness. All she asked, now, of life was that things should keep on as they were; that the rut in which she lived should become no rougher. And that, she realized, was much to ask. Ten or fifteen years ago, she wouldn't have thought so, but as with middle age hope departs, wisdom takes its place. Hope, she reflected, seeks to form life to its own patterns, whereas wisdom, experienced in defeat, knows how to yield and let itself be formed. Defeat.

Wisdom was the child of defeat—the child of hopes battered and dead. A beautiful child, too, if you weren't afraid to look at it.

Through her closed windows she heard the workmen, next door, urging on their horses, and from the back yard the sweet tenor voice of Jason:

“Down went McGinty to the bottom of the hole.

Then the driver of the cart

Give the load of coal a start,

And it took us half an hour to dig McGinty from the coal,

Dressed in his best suit of clothes.”

In the absent-minded way of one who sings to lighten labour, he would chant the chorus, stop for a time, and commence again, always the same refrain.

From the alley behind the stable echoed the shouts of romping children—a new crop of children now, whose play was carried on in alleys and back yards, since vacant lots had all but vanished. It was hard to realize that Alan, Blanche, and those of their generation were no longer skylarking out there. Only a short time ago, she had been darning a little boy's stockings, putting new knees in them; and now, as if by magic, the stockings had become socks almost as big as her father's. How fast things changed! Though she didn't feel so, she was really middle-aged. She didn't mind the crow's-feet as she did the fullness under her chin, the loss of contour. Yes, somehow, without noticing it, she had become a middle-aged woman.

Her mind ran back to the days when her father built this house, the first house on the block. How glad she had been when Luke and Nannie Holden built next door, and when the Burchards and Dunhams came. Four houses made them feel quite citified. She thought of Alan's infancy, visioning him in a straw hat with a curled-up brim and ribbons hanging down behind; of his mother, of Nannie, of excursions she and Nannie had made with the two children, and summer evenings, long ago, when the neighbours came over and sat on the side porch in the darkness, listening to her father's stories of adventure in the Illinois wilderness. How happy they had been!

The day was fading, and sounds from next door told her that the workmen were going home. On her way to light the gas, she glanced out of the window. The excavation was larger now. To-day they had made much progress—"progress," she supposed, was what they called it!

Sitting down again, she continued her mending, and presently noticed that with each sway of her rocking chair a faint squeak sounded from a loose board under the Brussels carpet. She had never thought about the board before, but now she realized that it had always squeaked, and that she liked the companionable sound.

From the kitchen below came the brazen note of the doorbell jangling on its coiled spring, and presently she heard the dull, blanketing slam of the front door, followed by Delia's step on the stairs.

But it wasn't callers: it was a note addressed to

her in Blanche's handwriting. She opened it and read:

Tuesday morning.

DEAREST AUNT MARTHA:

I am writing this just before taking the train to Milwaukee, where Ray and I are to be married. I feel dreadfully about not telling you beforehand, but it seemed best not to mention it to any one—not even to you—because there might be opposition, and that would only complicate things. I don't know whether you would have advised against it or not. Probably you would have. I know I am very young to marry, and if I had a real home I might have waited awhile. Since Mother's death, your house has been like home to me, and I would have gone to you now, but I couldn't stand to be there while the building was going on, knowing how Mother would feel about it, and what a blow it is to you all. And I couldn't bear it at the Shires' any longer.

I don't think Father and Florence will care much, and I hope you won't feel that I have made a mistake. Ray has enough money to support us until he gets started with his literary work, and New York is the place for that. I wish you knew him better. He is very talented, and he thinks I can help him to succeed, but anyway, he needs me to take care of him.

I am going to miss all of you more than I dare to think about. It doesn't seem possible that I'll never again run through the gate between your yard and ours, and that I won't have you to go to about

things. What would I ever have done without you—all of you! I am so glad I have pictures of you and Grandpa Wheelock to take with me, and I wish Alan would send me a new one when he gets some taken. The only photograph I have of him is that funny little one in his new suit with the medal on it, when he couldn't make his hair stick down. I wonder if he remembers the little friendship ring he gave me? Anyway, tell him I'm taking it with me.

As soon as I know where I am going to be, I'll send you my address. Please write to me a lot and tell me all about everything.

Your loving
BLANCHE.

Blanche married!

The intelligence contained in the first sentence of the letter struck Martha Wheelock like a blow from a hammer, and she read the rest in a daze, less aware of the hurriedly written words before her eyes, than of thoughts like cries of protest reverberating through her mind.

Oh, no! It couldn't be! Blanche was only a child! She didn't realize! And the Norcross boy, of all people! Oh, no!

Leaping up, she ran to her father's door.

"Blanche has eloped with Ray Norcross!"

Through the darkness she could see her father in his shirtsleeves sitting on the edge of his bed. She hurried to his side, thrust the missive into his hand, and with trembling fingers struck a parlour match and lit the gas.

In silence, the old man drew out his steel-rimmed spectacles, put them on, read the letter, and handed it back to her.

"I suppose it's too late to do anything?" she said in a questioning tone.

He removed his spectacles, thrust them into his waistcoat pocket, rose from his seat on the bed, and with deliberation put on his coat.

"I suppose it's too late to do anything?" she repeated.

He stood for a moment looking at her intently as if considering the situation, his brow contracted, his eyes opened wider than usual; and when he spoke, it was only by implication that he answered her.

"It's Luke Holden!" he declared, thumping the foot of the sleigh-backed bed with his fist. "It's Luke Holden—the damned Democrat!"

Martha Wheelock had always been proud of her father's punctiliousness of speech—a punctiliousness the more remarkable in one who had led the rough life of the wilderness. No one could be more emphatic than he, but his emphasis was habitually achieved through the measured distinctness with which he uttered the words he desired to drive home. Profanity she had never before heard upon his lips, and she could not have been more amazed had Doctor Fleetwood cursed from his pulpit in St. Mark's. But even more amazing than her father's malediction she found her own reaction to it, for it filled her with a scandalous relief.

"Yes, Father," she breathed.

The old man let his arms fall to his sides.

"There's nothing to be done," he told her. "They're married by now, and in any case there would be no way to find them." He sighed. "Poor little Blanche! I hope she hasn't jumped from the frying pan into the fire."

"Do you think we ought to communicate with his parents or with the Shires?" she asked.

"I don't see why we should. She says nothing about it in her letter. No doubt she wrote them when she wrote you."

"Then the only thing to do," she said, "is to let her know as soon as possible that we stand by her. She'll know it without being told, but she'll be glad of a message from us." She felt for the watch attached to the long gold chain that hung about her neck, drew it from the little pocket at her belt, snapped open the cover and looked at the time.

"Alan said he'd be home this evening," she went on, "and that was the six-thirty-nine that just went by. He ought to be here now." She sighed, and the old man glanced quickly at her face, asking:

"Do you think this is going to hurt him much?"

"I don't know," she said. "He's not easy to read."

To this Zenas Wheelock assented with a nod, and there fell a little silence.

"When they were children," she presently continued, "Nannie and I used to have a little dream—they've always been so fond of each other—but lately—well, I don't know. And there's Leta. But I can't believe that's serious, although her mother talks about Alan a good deal." She paused, took the clothes-brush from his bureau, appeared to examine

the bristles, and uttered a seeming *non sequitur*: "The Purnells still owe Miss Lightner for the last two seasons."

"Hm'm," was her father's unilluminating comment as from the hall below came the sound of the front door closing.

"There he is now!" exclaimed Martha with a start, and as she heard Alan come bounding up the stairs, she quickly put down the brush, as if for some reason she feared to have him find it in her hand.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT'S the matter, Auntie?"

Her face must have shown him that she was troubled.

"Alan," she began, "we've had bad news." For a moment, she paused, seeking buffer phrases, but finding none, ended with a flat statement of the case: "Blanche has eloped with Ray Norcross."

His head jerked forward.

"She—she has?"

Martha nodded. "This came a little while ago. There are messages in it for you."

She gave him Blanche's letter, and as he stood by the gas fixture, reading it, with the light upon his frowning face, she gazed at him, trying to judge him as if he were a stranger.

Yes, he was a man. Living in the house with him, darning his big socks, hearing his deep, resonant voice, she had nevertheless kept on thinking of him as a boy, and even now that she told herself he was a man, she found it difficult to grasp the actuality.

He was a Wheelock, too. Curious how often Nature, in transmitting traits, would skip a generation. Alan was not at all like Harris—poor Harris, always vaguely puttering about—but was like his grandfather. People spoke of the resemblance, and she had always seen it, but never so clearly as

she saw it now. The triangular form of his back, mounting from narrow hips to broad shoulders, the sturdy poise of neck and head, the vigorous sculpturing of forehead, cheek, nose, and jaw, the wiry brown hair, no longer shaggy like a boy's, these combined not only to assure her that Alan had grown up, but to create for her a vivid picture of her father as he must have looked in his young manhood.

Shifting her eyes to Zenas Wheelock, who had sat down in his armchair and was gazing abstractedly into the blue darkness beyond the windowpane, she seemed to see, beneath his snowy eyebrows and cross-hatched wrinkles, the visage of the youth he had been. And now, with a sense of profound discovery, there came to her a vision of Alan and his grandfather, not as separate entities, but joined together like the two halves of a shining cycle, all but complete.

Of cycles the whole of nature and of history seemed to be composed—cycles of space and time, the solar system, the recurrent seasons, the tides with their endless ebb and flow, war and peace, prosperity and panic, justice and injustice, pleasure and pain, riches and poverty, human generations, individual human lives, each travelling its arc like a relay-runner covering his segment of the course and dropping out as the torch is seized by a younger hand. As his grandfather had received the torch from seafaring progenitors, so Alan must receive it from his grandfather and bear it forward.

Her meditations were interrupted by her nephew's voice.

"My goodness!" he muttered, as if speaking to

himself. Having read the letter, he continued to stare at it blankly, stroking the back of his head with one hand. "My goodness!"

Zenas Wheelock turned slowly in his chair.

"Alan," he inquired, "just what sort of boy is this young Norcross?"

His grandson thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and took a turn up and down the room.

"I've thought a good deal about that," he answered, "and I'm hanged if I really know. He's always seemed to me a queer fish—all contradictions."

"He's clever, isn't he?" his aunt inquired.

"Yes, clever as all get-out. His mother claims he's a genius—tells him so—but as we haven't gone in for geniuses around this neighbourhood, I can't judge." A faint, dry smile crossed his face, and he continued: "Years ago, when we were kids and he came from New York to visit the Burchards, I thought he was the most wonderful boy I'd ever seen. He's a couple of years older than I am—that impressed me—and he's travelled a lot and knows how to do things with a flourish. I guess he and Blanche liked each other right from the beginning. You can't help liking him, if he wants you to. He can make people like him, even when they don't exactly approve of him. He'll be pleasant to you one day, and beastly the next, but you forgive him."

"Charm," suggested his aunt.

"Yes, that's what I've been trying to say. Don't you think, Aunt Martha, that a fellow with all that charm ought to be successful?"

"The trouble is," she replied, "that people with charm tend to trade on it. It's no more an index to character than style is."

"Not as much," put in the old man. "Style doesn't confuse us, and that is exactly what charm does: it muddles our judgment."

"I guess that's why he's always puzzled me," said Alan thoughtfully. "He's really gifted though—I shouldn't be surprised if he'd do something remarkable some day, and I shouldn't be surprised, either, if some day I heard he was in jail." He frowned and, as if arguing with himself, continued: "Well, anyway, he has some money of his own, and he's always been able to get whatever he wanted out of his mother, so they ought to be fairly comfortable."

"Yes," said Martha Wheelock, eager to perceive any favourable aspect of the case, "and Blanche could hardly be worse off than she's been at home. She may have enough influence over him to make things turn out all right—don't you think so, Father?"

"I hope so," said the old man, but his tone was not encouraging, and her little effort at optimism was stilled, leaving her spirits at a lower level than before.

"I couldn't feel it more deeply," she said, "if Blanche were my own child. In fact, I——" Her voice quavered, and she did not finish.

Again from downstairs had come the blanketing sound of the front door, and now Harris, carrying under his arm an oblong package, entered the room.

"Father," he announced, laying the package on

the bed, "I received some rather disconcerting news to-day, and it seems to me that——"

"We've heard about it," Martha broke in. "I got a letter from her this afternoon."

"*You* got a letter from her?" He looked surprised. "Why, I didn't know you knew her."

"Whom are you talking about?" she asked.

"Mrs. Boddy."

"Oh, I thought you meant Blanche."

Quickly she told him what had happened; but Harris, full of his own news, seemed hardly to hear, and after muttering a conventional expression of regret he proceeded, addressing his father:

"Mrs. Boddy came into the office this morning with a lot of new complaints about the Napier Place property. She says she's going to leave when her lease is up, and I'm blessed if I know where we'll get any one to replace her. Conditions down there seem to be worse than ever. The piano in the house next door keeps her awake all night, and the police won't do anything about it." While speaking he had opened the package on the bed, and now he lifted from their wrappings three old volumes bound in calf, and in a more cheerful tone continued:

"However, I've had a stroke of luck that more than made up for everything. I heard of a man away out on the West Side that had some old books for sale, and when I went out there, what do you think I found? A first of Boswell's Johnson and a Kilmarnock Burns in the original calf and in perfect condition!" Gently and with a kind of ecstasy he laid one volume of the Boswell in Zenas Wheelock's

lap. "Just look at it, Father. There's hardly a page that's foxed, and I got the three for a hundred and thirty dollars!"

Harris lighted the oil lamp on the table beside his father's chair, and the old man turned a few pages of the book.

"Very nice," he said, as if speaking to a child.

But Harris was not satisfied with such casual treatment of his treasure, and he continued to exhibit it, demanding appreciation of the binding, the frontispiece portrait of Doctor Johnson, the old wavy paper, and the quaint and dignified typography. "This is the real first," he proclaimed. "You see the date is 1791 and the word 'give' is misspelled on page 135. That makes it worth nearly double." Nor was that all, for having displayed the Boswell, he insisted upon a no less thorough inspection of the precious Burns.

Meanwhile Martha had dropped into a chair and was gazing blankly at the wall. After a time she looked up at Alan suddenly, and there was in her eyes an intently questioning expression, as if she wondered whether he perceived the inward significance of the little scene between his father and his grandfather. A fleeting smile, like an exchange of confidences, passed between them; and that smile started in Alan's mind a train of thought that ended, as trains of thought often do, far, apparently, from its starting point.

For some reason which he could not have explained, his thoughts turned to college, and he found himself looking back over his first year, now almost ended,

and trying to estimate its value. It had been a pleasant and not unprofitable year, yet somehow he wasn't satisfied. Why had he gone to college? Because it seemed to be the thing to do if you could manage it. Throughout the country there was a growing convention in favour of higher education for boys and girls, and colleges were springing up everywhere. College might be all right if you had the time and money, but time and money were beginning to look more valuable to him. He was turning the matter over in his mind when his thoughts were interrupted by Delia, in the doorway, announcing that Miss Leta wished to see Mr. Alan. (Good old Delia—she tried so hard to remember to call him "Mister.")

Catching a look of surprise on Martha's face, Delia was quick to interpret and answer it, explaining with a wide Irish smile:

"She wouldn't come in. She's waitin' on the poorch."

"I'll be right down," answered Alan, but instead of immediately following Delia, he hesitated, glancing at Blanche's letter in his hand. "If you don't mind," he said to his aunt without looking at her, "I'll keep this awhile. I—I didn't read it very carefully."

She assented, and Alan, murmuring a word of thanks, thrust the letter into his breast pocket, and hastened from the room.

Reaching the foot of the stairs, he saw that the front door was standing slightly ajar, and when he opened it, a shaft of light from the hall chandelier

revealed Leta standing outside, with the dry leaves of the honeysuckle vine forming a shadowy curtain behind her.

"What made you wait out here?" he asked. "Won't you come in?"

"Oh, no, thanks—really!" Nervously she shifted her weight from one foot to the other. "I hope your aunt won't think I'm bold, coming round to your house like this, but Mother and I just heard—heard the news, and supper's about ready, so there wasn't time to send a note. We realize you must be pretty upset, and we thought it might take your mind off things if you'd just come over and have supper at our house. Somebody sent us some prairie chickens, and Mother thought——"

"It's awfully kind of you, Leta," he said, "but ——" He stopped, unable to find words which, without making him seem ungrateful to the point of rudeness, would tell her that he wished to be alone this evening.

"Of course," she assured him quickly, "if you don't want to come, I'll quite understand. You mustn't feel as if you had to explain."

Alan was touched. Moreover, this embarrassment made her very pretty, heightening the colour of her cheeks where the little curls brushed them, and causing her blue eyes, gravely regarding him, to appear unusually large.

"It's awfully kind of you," he said again. "Why, yes, I'd like to. Do come in just a second, won't you?"

But Leta resolutely shook her head and started down the steps.

"Won't you even wait while I get my hat?" he asked, smiling.

"I'll walk on slowly."

He called upstairs, telling his aunt where he was going, and dashing out, caught up with Leta. When they had passed the gate, her arm crept into his, and as they moved on through the darkness, he felt her hand travel down his coat sleeve to his palm. He closed his fingers over hers.

"Never mind!" she whispered.

It was comforting to be with Leta.

CHAPTER XXI

WHETHER because of restlessness during the spring months following Blanche's elopement, or because of a growing realization of his father's futility, Alan's plans changed before the end of his first year at Northwestern University.

Under the magic of Rockefeller millions, and more millions contributed by diverse wealthy citizens, the new University of Chicago, facing the Midway Plaisance, was now all but ready to open, and because of its accessibility from Oakland, he had thought seriously of transferring thither when classes began in the autumn. But by June—the June of Grover Cleveland's third nomination, which took place in Chicago—he had decided otherwise; and midsummer saw him entered as a student at a downtown business college, where, besides shorthand, typewriting, and bookkeeping, economics and business law were taught.

Often when the weather was not too hot he would ride to the business college on his safety, joining the great stream of cyclists in which a few dogged veterans on high wheels were now anachronisms. Horsemen and pedestrians bitterly complained of the "bicycle craze," as it was called, and "scorchers" were frequently arrested; yet the vogue of the wheel

was steadily growing, some women, even, having taken it up in spite of hampering skirts.

One woman rider, Sophie Schoen, a tall, supple girl with massed gold hair and incredibly fair skin, sat next to Alan in the shorthand class. Sophie lived on Thirty-first Street; sometimes Alan would meet her by chance on Michigan Avenue and ride with her to school, and often they would start home together in the evening. She was amiable, not too well educated, and rather lazy; shorthand she loathed, and she would chew her pencil and frown as she tried to read her notes; but always, as they started home, colour would come into her cheeks, and her blue eyes would brighten.

"I used to hate Sunday," she told Alan one afternoon as they pedalled up the broad avenue; "it's such a stupid day; but I just love it now, because a fellow in our building's got a tandem-bike and takes me out. Last week we rode to Pullman and took our lunch with us, but it's awfully awkward for a girl, so I'm getting me a divided skirt. Mamma's shocked with me 'cause it only comes to the tops of my gaiters, but if she had to ride a bicycle, she'd see." Her tone, at once inquiring and defensive, told him she was wondering what he thought.

"I'm sure you'll look nice in it," he said. "You always look mighty nice in everything." And he spoke the truth, for though her clothes were of the simplest, Sophie Schoen was a prettily made girl and carried herself with an indolent grace that gave her a style entirely her own. Watching her as she moved about or sat frowning over her notes, Alan would

wonder what it was about the nape of her neck, and the white skin of her forearm showing in the little slit above her cuff, that so seduced his eye. She suggested physical strength curiously combined with lassitude, and it was perhaps this lassitude that made her seem to lack self-confidence.

"I'd ask you in for some lemonade or something," she said to him one hot September afternoon as on their bicycles they neared the corner of the street on which she lived, "but I guess you wouldn't enjoy it. My folks are perfectly respectable and all that, but I guess they aren't just the kind you're used to."

Alan felt sorry for her.

"If that's an invitation," he answered with a little smile, "I'd love to come."

As they rode across Thirty-first Street, she continued to explain apologetically about her family and the way they lived: "My father runs a barber shop, and our flat's upstairs; it's just a little bit of a place, and we haven't any——"

"Does he collect cigarette pictures?" Alan suddenly broke in.

"Why, yes. How did you know?" She was gazing at him in surprise.

"Your name, and the neighbourhood. It's funny I didn't think of it before. I sold him my collection long ago."

"Goodness gracious," exclaimed Sophie as they alighted in front of her father's shop, "how small the world is, after all!"

Having placed their bicycles in the rack near the cigar-store Indian outside the door of the barber

shop, they entered a dark, narrow hall scented with the smell of cooking cabbage, and ascended to the floor above, where Sophie ushered him into a tiny parlour, papered in dark red. On a table at the centre of the room stood a gas lamp, connected by a rubber tube with a fixture above, and beside the lamp a cornet and a photograph album with a heart-shaped mirror set in the centre of its scarlet plush cover.

"Mamma!" shouted Sophie, but there was no answer, and she led the way through a cramped dining room to a shadowy little corridor at the end of which was a kitchen about the size of a box-stall. In the kitchen Sophie seemed at home; while she squeezed lemons Alan cracked the ice, washed it, and dropped it into a glass pitcher.

"It's cooler in the parlour," she declared when the lemonade was ready, and though Alan attempted to carry the tinkling pitcher, she insisted upon taking it. As they passed through the narrow doorway into the dim little hall, he was pleasantly aware of the fragrance of "New-mown Hay" and of Sophie's shoulder touching his arm; and when again he felt the contact as they moved into the dining room, he knew that Sophie noticed, too, for she glanced at him and looked quickly away, murmuring: "Oh, excuse me."

For some reason, they found little to say as they sat on the short sofa in the bay window of the parlour and drank their lemonade, and when at the sound of footsteps on the stair outside, Sophie quickly removed herself to an adjacent rocking chair, Alan felt so self-conscious that he feared his state of mind

might be observed by Mr. Schoen, who now entered, looking, Alan thought, exactly as he had looked seven years earlier.

"Wo ist deine Mamma?" he asked Sophie.

"Ich weiss nicht. Sie ist nicht hier," she answered, and in English continued: "This is Mr. Wheelock. He goes to the business college, and he says he sold you some cigarette pictures or something."

Schoen slid his spectacles down to the end of his nose, and over the tops of them scrutinized Alan's face.

"I don't remember you," he declared, whereat Sophie looked embarrassed.

"It was a long time ago," said Alan, to which the barber replied:

"I dink so. You collegt also bostage stambs, young man?"

Alan answered that he did not, and the other continued: "My main collegting is stambs. Cigarette pictures iss only my side-line. I show you." He dived under the fringed edge of the magenta table cover and from a shelf produced two cigar boxes containing the coloured pasteboards—an enormous lot of them strapped in sets with rubber bands, which he slipped off, running the pictures over for Alan's inspection. Some of his sets—"Flags of all Nations," "Fifty Fish from American Waters," "Birds of America," "City Flags," "Playing Cards," and "Leaders of the World"—he told Alan, with pride, were complete; and he believed he had every soldier picture issued with Sweet Caporal cigarettes. The latter interested Alan most, for among the soldiers

he recognized not a few as having once been his. Likewise he recalled vividly some of the "Beauties of the World," and he was inspecting them when a bundle of pictures slipped from Mr. Schoen's hand and scattered over the crimson-flowered carpet.

"*Mein Gott!*" exclaimed the barber, and all three bent to gather up the pictures.

Actresses!

Even more than "nickel novels" dealing with the adventures of Diamond Dick and other reckless characters, these tiny photographs of women of the stage had been taboo among the Oakland youth of Alan's generation. The two boys in the public school who had collected them came from west of Cottage Grove Avenue, and it was their habit, when showing them, to retire into corners, snickering. Picking up the pictures, with Sophie at his side, Alan was embarrassed, but Schoen felt no such delicacy; and when, in the course of reassembling the pack, he came upon a specimen that particularly pleased him—a recurvous "boy" of extravaganza, wearing tights and an hour-glass bodice—he called Alan's attention to it, exclaiming:

"*Ach*, but she's a volumptuous voman! *Dot's* a bair of leks dot *iss* leks!"

"Why, Pappa!" Either Sophie was shocked by the anatomical allusion, or she was afraid it would shock Alan; moving away from the table, she drew aside a starched lace window curtain and appeared to look out upon the street; but her disapproval did not daunt her father, who winked broadly at Alan, and began to show him a series entitled "Beautiful

Bathers," depicting damsels of incredible shapeliness posing on the beach in costumes that could have existed only in the fancy of a dissolute lithographer—for they were minus sleeves, skirts, and stockings.

After making a polite pretense of examining the racy cards, Alan turned again to the military pictures, running them over and noting his favourites of long ago.

"I sold you more than a hundred of these," he told the proprietor of the collection, "and I certainly hated to part with them, but I needed the money."

Something in the phrase must have set up an echo in Mr. Schoen's memory, for after gazing intently into Alan's face he cried: "Vy, sure! You're dot boy came to my shop von day so grazy to sell. Vy sure, now I rememper. *Gott*, you vas comigal!" He laughed, slapping his knee.

Sophie, meanwhile, had been wandering restlessly about, now straightening a picture on the dining-room wall, now returning to the parlour and changing the position of various small articles on the mantelpiece—a photograph in a red plush frame, a shepherd lad of tinted china, a brown glass fish, a silver slipper containing a pincushion, and a conch-shell on which was painted a sailboat. Meanwhile, she hummed abstractedly, and once, in a low voice, she sang two bars of the song:

"After the ball is o-ver
After the break of day——"

When, presently, her father took up his cornet and began fingering the stops, she looked disturbed,

and Alan, feeling that Mr. Schoen had done quite enough to entertain him, quickly made his adieus. Sophie, however, followed him to the outer hall, and as the air was rent by a wailing blast from the musical instrument, closed the door behind her.

"I'm sorry," she said meekly. "I guess you won't want to come again." She was standing close to him, and once more he was aware of the scent of New-mown Hay.

"Nonsense," he replied as he started down the stairs, "of course I will." He tried to speak convincingly but he was not sure that he did wish to return. He was vaguely sorry for Sophie. In spite of her prettiness she was pathetic, arousing in him a protective instinct that seemed, when you considered it, rather senseless, since there was nothing from which she needed protection. But what had that to do with the question whether or not he should go to see her again? After all, there was no special reason why he shouldn't go sometimes if he felt like it.

Emerging into the daylight, he took his bicycle from the rack beside the painted Indian effigy. The shabby street, the barber shop and its proprietor were apparently untouched by the seven years that had passed since he came here to sell his cigarette pictures. How he had suffered at parting with them, and how one's sense of values changed! Those little coloured prints of soldiers in wooden attitudes now seemed to him entirely absurd—except for the memories they summoned back.

Riding homeward, Alan thought of the friendship ring and of the evening when he followed Blanche

through the gate and gave it to her. It didn't seem so very long ago, yet the gate was gone, the lindens that used to overhang the fence were gone, the very garden where he had given her the ring was gone—buried under Luke Holden's flat-building. And Blanche was married and living in New York. But she still had the ring.

He wondered whether Blanche and Ray would come back next spring for the World's Fair. He should think Ray would want to see his father's building, and he knew that the Norcrosses were urging them to come, but Blanche seemed to feel that it would be awkward unless her father got over being angry at her, and there didn't seem to be much hope of that, for since coming home, Luke had been more sullen than ever.

Even if Blanche and Ray did come back to the Fair, they wouldn't stay long in Chicago. Blanche's letters made that clear. Ray, she wrote, was determined to live in New York, where, apparently, both of them were very happy.

In one of her letters to Martha she described their rooms, with windows looking over roofs to the Hudson River. When she had finished her housework, she would sit and watch the steamers going up and down. She and Ray had safeties with pneumatic tires, and they took long rides into the country when Ray wasn't working. But generally he worked hard, and they were elated because he had sold two verses to a humorous paper called *Life*. Perhaps, after all, Ray was settling down, and would be a success and make Blanche happy.

Pedalling along, Alan fell to thinking of New York, wondering what it was like, and how it would seem to live there. It must be pretty hard to leave the place where you'd grown up and go to a strange city. Just the same, he'd like to see New York.

As he neared home, he reflected on the changes in the neighbourhood since Blanche went away. Luke Holden's flat-building, the "Florence," projecting to the sidewalk's edge, cut off the view of the Wheelock house and destroyed the symmetry of the street. On the corner above, another flat-building was rising. The only remaining vacant lot on that side of the way was being turned into a tennis club, and Jersey Belle, the one cow left, was making a last brave stand in the back yard.

Alan wasn't quite accustomed to the "Florence" even yet. Until the lindens were cut down, he hadn't realized their softening effect. Without them, the boxlike form of his grandfather's house was mercilessly revealed, and the colour seemed somehow to have faded out of the paint, leaving a clapboarded rectangle, like a pale physiognomy with dull eyes, confronting the brick sidewall of what Zenas Wheelock, noting the name carved on the lintel, called "Luke Holden's Taj Mahal."

CHAPTER XXII

SELDOM in the history of human settlements has it been possible to discern the precise moment at which a gawky, gangling town attains the actual state of cityhood; but in the case of Chicago the date and hour may be named. Incorporated in 1837, when wolves howled in the winter streets, Chicago was for fifty-six years technically a city before it gained the poise and power and ruthless pride that are the attributes of every great metropolis.

The sudden metamorphosis began at precisely nine o'clock on the rainy morning of May 1, 1893, when a brass band, stationed before the Lexington Hotel, broke into sound and action, and regardless of raw gusts and showers, stepped briskly up Michigan Avenue to the spirited tune of Sousa's "Washington Post March," which set prancing the horse of the procession's leader, General Nelson A. Miles, who in his yellow sash, gold epaulettes, and magnificent cocked hat, would hardly have been recognized by Geronimo, his captive of a few years earlier.

Behind the General came his regulars, cavalry and artillery, escorting President Cleveland and the Duke of Veragua, grandee of Spain and lineal descendant of an Italian mariner, one Cristoforo Colombo, who, four hundred years and six months prior to this day,

discovered a certain island which he named San Salvador.

Brass bands, silk hats, and carriages. The World's Columbian Exposition! Brass bands, silk hats, and carriages. The largest building on earth! Brass bands, silk hats, and carriages. The greatest Fair ever seen in the universe! And so forth.

Shortly after the hour of noon on the same day, before a quarter of a million people in the Court of Honour, a special air was played by a band of five hundred pieces, a special prayer was prayed, and a special poem recited; whereafter, the President, touching a button, set the engines going, the fountains spurting, the flags flying.

So the Fair was opened. And with the Fair, Chicago crowned herself a city, announcing to the world that her splendours and her horrors alike were now gigantically urban.

Even the river, remembered by Zenas Wheelock as a limpid, reed-grown stream, had become urban. It was now a sewer hemmed in by grimy wharves, warehouses, factories, and lumber yards, and coated with a film of slime which, cut by the shipping, drifted into stagnant corners, where it caked, forming a floor of matted grease and flotsam over which ran the enormous rats which inhabited the piling.

The forking of this malodorous current divided the city, like Gaul, into three parts, but these parts were closely linked. Under the river, cable cars bored their wormlike way, while across innumerable bridges rattled an ever-swelling traffic, checked at intervals by autocrats perched in the iron framework,

who, during the season of navigation, turned the bridges, giving temporary right of passage to bluff-bowed cargo boats and spindle-masted schooners, the latter towed by tugs from which came sounds of inner anguish and a vomit of black smoke.

The smoke was wholly metropolitan. Rising from tugs and steamers, it blended with the sable plumes of a thousand chimneys and a thousand shunting trains, creating, when the air hung heavy above the city, a haze through which the sun appeared a sickly yellow blur. And as water, drawn skyward in the form of mist, descends as rain, so from this murky pall there fell in a gentle but persistent shower the black snow of industrialism, smudging downtown buildings to a neutral grayness through which emerged dimly the tints of brick, stone, or paint, and griming impartially the collars of young clerks and their employers, the hands of working women, and the brave white gloves of ladies in victorias.

Abetted by erratic winds, streamers of smoke made swift excursions through the city, now flying down the market district of South Water Street, bright with fruit and vegetables; now touring adjacent blocks to the eastward where the air was fragrant with spices and fresh-roasted coffee; now soaring aloft to streak past the topmost windows of that twenty-story marvel the Masonic Temple, tallest building in the world; now joining forces with the little locomotives of the new South Side Elevated Railroad to visit the reeking shambles of the stock-yards, and the unhallowed district, to the west of

Oakland, whence came the "Micks." Or again our vagrant wisp of smoke might follow the Illinois Central Railroad along the south shore of the lake, and reinforced at intervals by passing trains, skim wraith-like over the stone buildings of the great new university on the Midway, or attaining the World's Fair grounds, not far distant, spend itself in a final, hopeless effort to dim the splendour of those shimmering palaces.

The period of the Chicago World's Fair marked not only the birth of a great city, but the close of an era which, though not free from disturbances, had, by contrast with the era following, the flavour of a pastoral. Whittier, Lowell, Louisa May Alcott, E. P. Roe, James G. Blaine, General Sherman, Jefferson Davis, Henry Ward Beecher, Phillips Brooks, Cyrus W. Field, George W. Childs, Jay Gould, Edwin Booth, Albani, P. T. Barnum, Jumbo, "The Black Crook," Maud S., and Sitting Bull had but recently faded out of the American picture; Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, George W. Cable, Julia Ward Howe, James Whitcomb Riley, Eugene Field, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Bishop Potter, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mrs. Potter Palmer, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Edison, Whistler, Theodore Thomas, Emma Eames, Ada Rehan, John Drew, Loie Fuller, Buffalo Bill, Nellie Bly, "Pop" Anson, John L. Sullivan, "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, the Dime Museum, the G. A. R., Richard Croker, Ward McAllister and the "400" were in sharp focus; while emerging, or soon to emerge, were William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Lieutenant Peary,

Augustus Saint Gaudens, Stanford White, John Singer Sargent, Frederick Remington, Charles Dana Gibson, Richard Harding Davis, "Chimmie Fadden" Townsend, Maude Adams, Lillian Russell, Weber & Fields, Debs, Coxey's Army, the "coon song," the "hootchy-kootchy," and the W. C. T. U.

In Hawaii, the old Queen Liliuokalani had been deposed, and in Holland the young Queen Wilhelmina had ascended the throne; in Siam the first train had been run, and in America James J. Hill had built the Pacific Extension of his Great Northern Railroad; in India the free coinage of silver had been abandoned as unsound, and in the United States it was beginning to be advocated by the "boy orator" Bryan.

The industrial age, the age of trusts, machinery, strikes and speed, was started. The "Exposition Flyer" dashed from New York to Chicago in the record time of eighteen hours; the bicycle craze was bringing about highway improvement, and a Detroit madman by the name of Henry Ford was fooling with a horseless carriage which sometimes actually ran; the phonograph was in existence; a man named Eastman had invented a flexible photographic film and an instantaneous magazine camera, the "kodak"; and with this flexible film Edison was experimenting on a machine he called a cinematograph, by means of which he hoped to project photographs in motion. On the South Side of Chicago a street-car line was now being operated by means of an overhead trolley. The electric light, the telephone, and the typewriting machine were well established, though, to be sure, some people of

the older generation refused to traffic with such innovations.

Among these conservatives was Colonel Burchard, who, though he remained at home with his family during the summer of the Fair, always with a house full of guests, seemed mildly to resent the great upheaval. The Colonel's house, across the way from the Wheelocks', represented in their minds a kind of fortress, one place at least that stood secure against the forces of change. By contrast with the narrowing lots of the last decade, the Burchard grounds took on a look of even greater spaciousness; the carefully tended shrubbery and trees, the handsome flowerbeds, the iron children of the fountain with water trickling over their umbrella, and above all, the brick house, stalwart and quietly imposing, seemed to defy the outlander and guarantee the maintenance of Oakland's neighbourhood tradition. Unlike Zenas Wheelock, Colonel Burchard had recognized the annexation of Oakland by the city, a few years earlier, by selling his cow, but though the eye of a knowing horseman could readily detect in his pair of trotters the signs of age, they were still able to make good time among the bicycles on the boulevards when the Colonel drove to and from his office.

On leaving college several years earlier, Tom Burchard had gone to work in his father's lumber business; lately he had been made a partner in the firm and was becoming more and more active in its management; but the Colonel, nearing seventy, was hale and active, and though he seldom visited the lumber yard, he still went daily to the office which

for many years he had maintained in a building near the Board of Trade. Here, with the aid of Haskins, an old clerk, he administered a considerable business.

Indirectly, it was the World's Fair that set Alan Wheelock to work in this office, when he was called in to substitute for Haskins, who had been stepped upon by a camel at the very door of that pavilion on the "Streets of Cairo" in which "Little Egypt" did her more than dubious dance.

"If I only hadn't gone to the dang place!" he kept saying to the Colonel when the latter, hearing of the event, hastened to see him at St. Luke's. "It's no place for a decent man—and what will you ever do without me while the bone's setting?"

Six weeks later, the old clerk, leaning on a cane, returned to the office, to find the Colonel, whose letters had hitherto been written in longhand, a convert to stenography; and as Haskins, after critical inspection of the books, was obliged to admit that they had been satisfactorily kept, the Colonel presently contrived to draw from him the suggestion that Alan be retained. This he accomplished by complaining of his eyes and of the difficulty of writing by hand, and also by encouraging Haskins to dictate letters to Alan, and send him out to make collections and do other errands; and any jealousy Haskins might have felt was removed when the Colonel, instead of himself making the announcement, authorized Haskins to inform Alan that his position was now permanent. Somehow, too, the Colonel managed, without explicit statement of the situation, to make Alan realize that a man of Haskins's years

and condition might be sensitive concerning his prerogatives. Alan was therefore on his guard; he scrupulously maintained the attitude of a subordinate, and the visible expansion of Haskins under this treatment gave him quiet amusement and at the same time taught him something about business and about human nature.

Except for a few days following the first of the month, work at the office was not heavy; often Alan was able to get out to the Fair before evening, sometimes accompanying his grandfather and his aunt, sometimes with Leta, occasionally with Sophie. Now and then Leta would meet him downtown and they would voyage to the Fair Grounds on the whale-back *Christopher Columbus*, arriving in time to watch the miraculous transition as the glow of sunset upon western walls turned from flame-colour to rose and purple, fading until, at a magic moment, a million lights on bridges, cornices, and towers flashed to incandescence. In the Court of Honour, with its swaying banners, its sculptured fountains sending lacy jets on high, and the lake blue and shadowy beyond the snowy columns of the peristyle, night fell with incredible splendour, but Alan and Leta liked best to spend this hour in a gondola, moving swan-like through the lagoons.

One Saturday afternoon in September, while they were dining at "Old Vienna," listening to Ziehrer's band and watching the curiously assorted crowd, Alan heard a familiar laugh, and looking up saw Sophie. She was accompanied by a stocky man whose hair showed gray beneath the brim of his

jauntily tilted hat, and Alan had never seen her so becomingly attired.

From the day when he first saw her frowning over her shorthand book, Sophie had held for him a charm unlike anything he had known before. Until he met her he had supposed that a strong attraction must necessarily be accompanied by respect, but the strain of weakness in her character, prohibiting respect, had seemed actually to draw him to her. He was sorry for her; yet the protective instinct she had kindled in him—an instinct fundamentally creditable—had been, paradoxically, the very thing that made him fail to protect her against herself. That she had encouraged him to embrace her was no excuse. If she was weak, so had he been weak—doubly so—for, having made up his mind not to see her again, he had repeatedly gone back, each time saying to himself that this must be the end. Still later, he had harboured a belief that when they should leave the business college the affair would automatically be terminated. But Sophie had found out where he worked, and at intervals she telephoned, asking him to call, saying she was in difficulties and wanted his advice. Once, when she called up, he was alone in the office, but when he asked her to tell him what the trouble was, she said she couldn't—she must see him.

Perhaps she had been sincere in saying she wanted his advice the time she lost her job, but he wondered whether it was true that her new employer, a married man, was in love with her, or whether the tale had been invented to disturb him. Sophie seemed to

like to keep him worried, and though instinct told him his concern for her was wasted, the sight of her, or the sound of her sweet, drawling voice, was enough to throw him off his balance, so potent was that spurious charm of hers.

Now, as he rose and greeted her, there came again to his nostrils the scent of New-mown Hay, her favourite perfume.

“Where have you been all this time?” she asked, coquettishly reproachful. “Why haven’t you been to see me?”

He murmured something about being busy, and as Sophie’s escort hurried her along, dropped into his seat again, and glanced at Leta, who was measuring Sophie with her eyes.

“Who’s that?” she asked.

“A girl I knew in business college.”

“What’s her name?”

He told her, wishing he had mentioned Sophie to her long ago. He had intended to, but had put it off—at first because the subject never seemed naturally to introduce itself, and later because it was distasteful.

“She called you Alan,” said Leta.

“We sat at the same table in the shorthand class for months,” he said defensively as they rose.

“Just you two?”

“Of course not. There were six of us.”

They crossed the courtyard, and passing through the gate turned on to the Midway.

“She said you’d been to see her,” pursued Leta presently.

"No," he corrected, "she asked why I hadn't been to see her."

"She meant lately," declared Leta, and to that he was obliged to agree.

"I've often thought of telling you about her, but somehow I didn't get around to it." He hesitated, then added lamely: "Not that there's anything much to tell." And as Leta was silent, he continued: "She's pathetic. They live in——" But there she checked him, repeating in a scornful voice:

"Pathetic!"

"Well, she is."

"Hm-m!" said Leta drily, and they continued through the crowd of merrymakers without speaking.

"I don't see why you're acting this way, Leta," he told her after a time.

"What way? What have I done?"

"You aren't being very nice to me."

"Perhaps I'd better go home, then." She stopped walking, but at that he became voluble with protests.

"Don't be ridiculous! You're not going home or anything of the kind. We'll finish the evening as we planned."

Meekly enough, it seemed, Leta moved on with him toward the landing place, where presently they stepped into a gondola and took their seats beneath the canopy.

The lights of distant buildings, mirrored in the smoke-coloured water, exploded into glittering frag-

ments with each ripple, and painted the covering above them with a luminous and shifting moiré. An electric launch slipped by, and after it was gone they felt its wake, and heard the hollow sound of little waves slapping at the prow of their craft. The Wooded Island hung like a dark cloud on the lagoon, and when they drew into its shadow Alan was spell-bound by the beauty of the night and the illusory sense of solitude. Here the silence between Leta and himself seemed fitting, and bemused as he was, he had all but forgotten their recent discord, when she spoke:

“You’ve had her out here at the Fair, too, haven’t you?”

Her words, breaking in upon his reverie, showing him that all this time she had been nursing her resentment, exasperated him; nor was his exasperation in any wise diminished by the accuracy of her conjecture.

“Yes, I have,” he challenged, facing her in the darkness, “and what of it? Whose business is it, anyway?”

But no reply came, and when he heard sounds that told him she was weeping he was filled with contrition. How kind she had always been to him, how thoughtful, generous, loyal! There flashed into his mind the memory of the consolation she had given him at the theatre, long ago, when Blanche was sitting in a box with Ray; and of that other evening, last year, when the news of Blanche’s elopement came, and Leta called for him and took him home

with her for supper. For a long time now they had been going together like this, and never once had she let him doubt that he came first with her. How could he have brought himself to carry on with Sophie? And how, having done so, could he have blamed Leta for being hurt?

"Oh, Leta," he begged, "don't! Please don't cry! I'm awfully sorry! It was a beastly thing to say! I wouldn't hurt you for the world, Leta—not for the world! Please, please!" In the obscurity he fumbled for her hand; but when he found it, she drew it violently away.

"Leta! Please, dear, please! I can't tell you how sorry I am!"

"But it's true!" she answered in a choking voice. "It's perfectly true! It *isn't* any of my business! That's the worst of it!"

"No," he insisted, "you were perfectly right! It *is* your business! You have every right to blame me! Don't cry, Leta, dear! Give me your hand!" Again he tried to take it; this time he found it wet with tears.

"No!" she cried. "I'm a fool! I've made a fool of myself—that's what I've done! You can go with any one you please—wherever you like—and I have nothing to say! Nothing at all, and I know it! Oh, I've been a fool, a fool!"

He flung his arm about her, and holding her close to him, felt her body shivering with sobs.

"No, Leta! I'm the one that's been a fool—but that's all over. Just forgive me, and you'll see! You'll see! Tell me that you forgive me!" He

put his hand under her chin and lifting her face, looked down into it, trying to discover some sign of her relenting.

Presently she ceased to move, and with a sigh, relaxed. Her eyes opened, looking up at him; her hand lightly touched his cheek, and through the dimness he saw that she was smiling.

"Never again?" she murmured, and he understood the question.

"Never again," he replied with deep intensity.

CHAPTER XXIII

BY MEANS of devices so devious that only a good woman could have thought of them, Martha Wheelock succeeded in getting her father to Florida for the winter following the World's Fair.

At eighty-three he was still vigorous, but the year had been a trying one. Cleveland's election in the preceding November had greatly disappointed him, and the subsequent financial crisis, culminating with the midsummer of 1893, afforded final proof of that congenital incapacity which, in his opinion, marked all Democrats. Moreover, his old friend Charles Cleaver, first settler of Oakland, had lately died, and the World's Fair kept the city in a constant tumult. Most active of Chicago's few remaining pioneers, Zenas Wheelock became more than ever a public character. Edward Everett Hale, Charles Dudley Warner, Henry M. Stanley, and other distinguished strangers came to the house, and he was taken to call upon Julia Ward Howe, who discussed with him the rights of women; and upon the Infanta Eulalia of Spain, who amazed him by smoking cigarettes.

"The last woman I saw smoking," he remarked when he came home, "was an old squaw on the Sangamon River, but she smoked a pipe."

Most of his visitors interested him, but when one

afternoon a committee of ladies called with the request that he take part in a tableau, wearing robes and a wreath in impersonation of "The Spirit of the Past," his refusal was so abrupt that his daughter remonstrated with him after they had gone.

"Why did you walk out of the room like that, Father?" she asked.

"Because," he answered, "I decline to be treated as if I were a sacred white cow."

Through the six months of the Fair the house was continually filled with visitors. Nephews and nieces of Zenas Wheelock, gray-haired men and women, offspring of his brother Ophir, long since dead, appeared in relays; and Cousin Emma, the only one of them who had married, brought her husband, a New Hampshire mill-owner, and three grown children.

Meeting his New England relatives for the first time, Alan was struck by their resemblance to one another, and by the total dissimilarity between them and the members of his immediate family—except, perhaps, his father. Like his father, they were bookish and reserved, but there the parallel ended, for they had neither his vagueness nor his lethargy. Harris paid little attention to the Fair, but the New England relatives made a religion of it, going every day and driving themselves on with a conscientious determination to see everything.

Their mode of thought, even their mode of speech, was different. Though he liked them, Alan felt remote from them, and one evening in October, when the visitors had gone, he spoke to his aunt of this feeling.

"Father used to feel that way about Uncle Ophir," she told him. "He thought that he and Uncle Ophir should come West together and leave the property around Portsmouth for Uncle Thomas and their sister. Uncle Thomas was lame, and Uncle Ophir was a big, strong man, but had no enterprise. When the time came, he wouldn't leave home, and afterward, when Father wrote him to come to Chicago, he still refused. In his letters he was always asking about Indians and wolves and heating arrangements. Then he married Aunt Abbie, and she wouldn't hear of moving; so they remained in the old house, leading dull lives, but feeling safe, until one night something went wrong with the furnace and the coal-gas asphyxiated them. So their children took up the property, and there they are still.

"In the old days the strong men went to sea; but with the opening of the Middle West, they began to come out here as Father did. The Free Soil controversy and the gold rush took them farther and farther west. I've seen them streaming through Chicago in their Conestoga wagons with their dogs trotting beside them, heading out Ashland Avenue past the old Bull Head Tavern and over the plank road toward the prairie. Some were seeking opportunity, some were seeking adventure, some were trying to keep slavery out of Kansas; and always it was the strong who went and the weak who stayed behind. If Father hadn't been a high-spirited man, we'd be living back in New England still."

They had been talking in Martha Wheelock's room, and now, at the sound of the supper bell, they

rose and moved to the hall, where they met Zenas Wheelock coming from his doorway. Following his grandfather down the stairs, Alan noticed that he moved more slowly than usual, and when he spoke, his voice was hoarse. A sudden drop in temperature that afternoon had caught him at the Fair without an overcoat.

Next day, his cold was worse, and when Martha consulted the doctor, whom her father refused to see, he advised her to get him South for the winter.

"I'll see what I can do," she said, but she made no mention of the project to her father.

About this time it might have been observed that she developed an extraordinary preoccupation with her own health, saying that the Fair had exhausted her, that she hoped she might never see a visitor again, and that the thought of approaching winter chilled her to the marrow.

Zenas Wheelock became concerned about her, but when presently he suggested that she go South, she declined to entertain the idea, telling him she would be too lonely down there by herself. Nevertheless, he shrewdly divined that she longed to go, for frequently he found upon the library table pamphlets she had been reading—pamphlets containing tropical pictures that turned his thoughts back seventy-four years to a cruise in the old brig *Hyperion* commanded by his Uncle Ichabod.

How well he remembered the morning his uncle pulled him out of his bunk as they neared Havana harbour. The picture of the old Spanish fort at St. Augustine resembled Morro Castle. It must be

pleasant in St. Augustine just now. He would like to see that fort—and the famous new Ponce de Leon Hotel people talked so much about.

Seventy-four years since he had seen a palm-lined beach, orange trees, a grove of shaddock. No one in the North had seen shaddock in those days, but lately he had found them for sale in a market on South Water Street. "A new delicacy," said the man. "Grapefruit." They ought not to change the names of things. His grandfather had known Captain Shaddock.

Martha wasn't looking well. It wasn't like her to complain. Housekeeping was more wearing than most people realized, and she hadn't had a rest in years. He'd give her a surprise. He'd take her to Florida himself!

When he informed her of his intention, she seemed hardly able to believe her ears; and later, in St. Augustine, as they strolled along the sea wall in the golden sunlight, he would take credit to himself, reminding her that but for this great idea of his, they would be freezing in Chicago.

During Martha Wheelock's absence, Delia clearly felt her responsibility as housekeeper, and with two men to cater for made extra efforts, going daily to market with her basket, carefully selecting for Alan thick steaks and for his father sweetbreads or quail. Often she made muffins or hot rolls, and the delicious conserves and plum puddings usually reserved for company.

Nevertheless, the house was lonely. Harris as usual spent his evenings with his books, retiring after

midnight and rising after Alan had left for work. At supper, their one meal together, he would read, and if Alan spoke to him, would answer vaguely. Living alone with his father, Alan felt remoter from him than before, and he often puzzled over the gray figure across the table, marvelling that a human being could be so detached from the world in which he lived.

At first, Alan made it a point to keep his father company at supper, but as the other seemed hardly to notice whether he was there or not, he began to accept invitations to dine out, sometimes at the Burchards', but most often at Leta Purnell's.

The aversion to dancing which had persisted in him through the successive seasons of Miss Lightner's class was gone, for Leta had taken him in hand, patiently drilling him in her parlour to the accompaniment of tunes which they would hum together, accenting the beat as they glided over the red carpet—"After the Ball" and "Two Little Girls in Blue" for waltz time, and "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" for the new dance, the two-step, which was superseding the polka.

Dancing with other girls, Alan thought of himself as merely adequate; he could keep time and could reverse with less effort than would be required to stop the revolution of the world and make it turn the other way; but when he danced with Leta, he felt graceful and expert, and though he knew that the grace and the expertness were in reality not his but hers, her praise flattered him.

It was flattering also that by tacit understanding

he was Leta's invariable escort, and that he had first choice of her dances. He was proud of her at parties; proud of her looks, of the style with which she wore her pretty dresses, and of her popularity. There was never any trouble about getting Leta's programme filled; the moment she appeared, a crowd of boys would gather round her, and "courtesy extras" were taken in numbers that could not possibly be reached.

During the Christmas holidays, a scattering of lordly youths from Eastern colleges came home as usual, their collars a little taller, the toes of their shoes a little more pointed, their manners a little more elaborate than those of boys who attended nearer universities, or who, like Alan, were at work. Certainly, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton put a sartorial and tonsorial stamp upon their sons. Among the girls there was now much talking of college "frats" and clubs, and some of them wore pins of gold and enamel, bearing mysterious devices.

The sensation of the holidays was Hector Cozzens, Grant Hayes's roommate at Harvard, who lived on the North Side but came with Grant to many of the Oakland parties. He was tall and handsome with a shock of blond hair, long in the prevailing football manner, with a central parting from which it fell in splendid arches at each side. His Ascot and De Joinville ties were sumptuous, his scarfpins various and handsome, and his shirts, according to Grant, were made to order with the cuffs sewed to the sleeves—which must have been true, since, instead of being round and fastening with regular cuff-buttons, the

two edges met in a parallel line, being held in place by a contrivance of gold buttons and links.

From the first, it was apparent that Hector admired Leta, and with the outlander's indifference to established relationships, he quite disregarded Alan and at parties showed her marked attention.

One Sunday afternoon, when Alan was at the Purnells', Hector arrived, magnificent in Prince Albert and silk hat. Leta seemed slightly embarrassed by the call, but Mrs. Purnell, obviously impressed by the resplendent young man, made a special effort to entertain him, talking about Des Moines and people she had known there, telling of Leta's talent for recitation and fancy dancing, deploring her abandonment of these two arts, and enumerating qualities which, she said, accounted for her being such a favourite.

"I'll say *one* thing for my daughter," she told Hector as if everything else she had said were uncomplimentary, "—there's not a mean bone in her body. She never says an unkind thing about anybody, and I don't believe she ever thinks an unkind thought, either."

"I'm sure," Hector gravely agreed.

"And what's more," pursued the adoring mother, "she wouldn't raise a finger to make herself popular. Popularity just comes to her naturally, and she isn't a bit spoiled by it."

"Oh, *Mother!*" protested Leta, blushing.

"Oh, I know you don't like to hear me sing your praises," answered Mrs. Purnell, beaming at her, "but it's all perfectly true, and if a thing is true, I

don't see any reason why a person shouldn't speak out—do you, Mr. Cozzens?"

"Why, no, certainly not," said Hector.

As he was leaving, Mr. Purnell came downstairs wearing his red felt "Romeos" and carrying the Sunday paper.

"Let's see—where's your overcoat?" he said, fumbling among the garments on the hall rack; and upon Hector's replying that he wasn't wearing an overcoat, he exclaimed: "Lawky, I should think you'd freeze!"

"Goodness, Papa," said Leta when the door had closed behind the departing visitor, "haven't you noticed that hardly any of the Eastern college men wear overcoats with their Prince Alberts now? It's not the style."

"Style?" said her father. "What's that got to do with keeping warm?" He turned to Alan, asking: "You wear an overcoat, don't you?"

"Why, yes," said Alan, "but I haven't a Prince Albert."

Mrs. Purnell was at the parlour window watching through the lace curtains as Hector moved up the street.

"What a perfectly stunning fellow!" she cried. "Look how he carries his cane—upside down with the crook almost touching the walk. That must be the latest." And as Hector disappeared from view, she turned to them, and continued: "Did you notice the way he shook hands? I do like to see men bow from the waist, like that. It looks so"—she hesi-

tated for an instant ere she essayed the verbal leap—"so *fin de siècle*."

Mr. Purnell took Hector's calling-card from the table and appeared to study it.

"Cozzens," he murmured thoughtfully. "Must be some of those rich Cozzens pump folks."

"Really, Papa, I wish you——" But Leta was interrupted by her mother.

"One thing's sure," she declared, "and that is that it was mighty gal-lant of him to come away over here from the North Side to ask you for some dances, and you must certainly save him some."

"His father must be the one that drives the tally-ho," Mr. Purnell remarked; and Alan, who during Hector's call had felt that the situation was awkward, and who found the ensuing colloquy still more awkward, was glad of a chance to put in a word.

"Yes, he's the one," he informed Leta's father. "He takes ribbons at the horse show every year, and——" About to impart something further, he checked himself. Perhaps Colonel Burchard wouldn't want him to tell; and besides, if he did tell, it might appear that he was jealous. Therefore he said nothing of the fact that the Colonel, a stockholder, was disturbed about the condition of the Cozzens Pump Company.

Apparently, however, the company's difficulties were not of sufficient magnitude to affect Hector's allowance, for on the day of his return to college, he sent Leta a bunch of violets as large as a pie.

That evening the violets were exhibited to Alan.

He was sitting in the Purnells' parlour talking with Leta, when her mother came bustling into the room.

"Smell!" she cried, pressing the huge bouquet into his face. "Aren't they perfectly lovely? Wasn't it just too sweet of him?" A stranger might have supposed the violets had been sent to her rather than to Leta. "They came from Varden's, too!" she added, exhibiting the cover of the purple box.

Again Leta blushed. "Alan's seen violets before, Mother," she said reprovingly; and Mrs. Purnell had hardly left the room when Leta, turning troubled eyes to Alan, said:

"I was going to tell you myself, if Mother'd given me time."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE difficulties of the Cozzens Pump Company were of greater concern to Colonel Burchard than Alan had at first realized. Hector's grandfather, founder of the business, had been one of the Colonel's close friends, and the Colonel's stock interest, dating from the early days of the company, was large. Late in January, he called a meeting of stockholders at his office, and when a stockholders' protective committee was formed, he was unanimously elected chairman.

As secretary of this and subsequent meetings, Alan began to acquire a broad picture of business, and of the methods of successful men in dealing with large problems; and from hearing the plight of the company discussed by the Colonel and his associates, he gained considerable knowledge of its affairs, and of the causes of its present troubles.

The causes were not complex. Hector's father, it was agreed, lacked both the judgment and the industry of his progenitor. As president and general manager, he had left the running of the company to others, regarding it merely as a source of revenue for himself and several of his intimates whom he had put in as officers. Salaries had been arbitrarily raised and dividends arbitrarily increased; meanwhile, the surplus had shrunk, and investigation

now disclosed a probability that plants and inventories were carried on the books at figures much too high.

The case was calmly discussed from various viewpoints. It seemed to Alan that the quality outstanding in the ablest members of the committee was mere common sense, and it was perhaps because of this preponderance of common sense on the committee that Mr. Cozzens, when he appeared, made an impression so unfavourable. He was a handsome man, rather too conspicuously dressed for the occasion, and Alan's doubts concerning the genuineness of the confidence at first displayed by Mr. Cozzens were confirmed when, under the direct questioning of the bearded elders, he was forced repeatedly to answer that he didn't know, that he would have to look it up. When at last, detected in a slight equivocation, he flushed and stammered as he tried vainly to make a show of dignity, Alan was sorry for him because he was so plainly shown up as a fool.

The object of the committee was to avoid a receivership if possible, and to this end the members gave the company temporary aid from their own pockets while Colonel Burchard made a hasty effort to ascertain the actual state of its affairs.

Working with his employer on this investigation, Alan learned more of business methods. His days were spent mostly at the company's plant, and his evenings at the Burchard house, where a typewriter had been installed for him.

It was after two o'clock one morning when, having

typed the last pages of the Colonel's report, Alan placed it before him on the library desk.

"You've looked it over?"

"Yes, sir."

Without reading, the Colonel dipped his pen and signed; nor could any spoken praise have made Alan more proud.

"You've been a great help, Alan." The Colonel rose and laid his hand upon his shoulder. "I shall go to New York to-morrow to lay this matter before the bankers, and I'd like you to go with me if you can. Get some sleep and come over when you wake."

New York! Sleep! Thoughts altogether incompatible. Tired though he was, Alan lay awake for a long time that night, his mind filled with swift-moving visions of the journey, the arrival, the famous sights he was about to see. Reading a letter from Blanche, forwarded to him a few days ago by his Aunt Martha, he had wondered if he would ever see New York. And now, unexpectedly, he was going there. How surprised Blanche would be when he rang her bell! They hadn't seen each other since before she married. Two years!

On awakening next morning, he flung back the covers and leaped out of bed, and in less than an hour he was running up the steps to the high veranda of the big buff mansion across the way. His employer had breakfasted early as usual and by telephone had made arrangements for their departure that afternoon; Alan had only to pack, go to the ticket office, and meet him at the train.

The family's best hand baggage had gone to Florida

with his grandfather and his aunt, but with Delia's aid he found in the attic a little tan satchel and an old gray canvas "telescope" that fastened with a shawl strap and had the merit of capaciousness. It was thrilling to pack and say good-bye to Delia and Jason; and when, burdened with his impedimenta, he stopped at the Purnells', he felt like a hero of romance: one of those adventurous and debonair figures ready at a moment's notice to go dashing about the world.

The Purnells were astonished.

"How long will you be gone?" Leta asked.

"That's uncertain."

"Do you know where you'll stop?"

He tried to speak nonchalantly as he mentioned the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

"Gracious," exclaimed Mrs. Purnell, "I guess you'll hardly know your old friends after you get back!"

When he rose to go, she remained in the parlour, taking up a newspaper, while Leta followed him to the hall.

"Write often," she whispered as they stood in the shadowy corner by the front door; and in a normal voice she added: "Don't forget to tell me about the latest New York styles when you write."

"I don't know how good I'll be at that," he replied, smiling, "but I'll try."

She reached up, fingering a button on his overcoat. From the parlour came the rattle of the newspaper as Mrs. Purnell turned a page.

"They say sleeves are going to be perfectly enor-

mous," Leta said; whereat through the open doorway came her mother's voice supplementing:

"I hear they'll be of different material from the dress, too."

"I'll watch out for that, Mrs. Purnell."

Leta looked up at him with melting eyes.

"I'm going to miss you!" she whispered, and pressed her face to his.

From Randolph Street station, Alan hurried across town to reach his father before the latter should go out to lunch. Harris Wheelock's office, at the rear of the building, faced a smoke-grimed court, and the light penetrating the tall, streaked windows was so diluted that even at midday the room looked dark and gloomy. Because of the shortage of light, Harris usually sat with his back to a window, and from the door nothing of him was visible save the crown of his head projecting above the superstructure of the roll-top desk. To-day as Alan opened the door he heard voices; and entering, he saw in the chair beside the desk the bulky figure of Mr. Shire.

The conversation abruptly stopped, and as Alan put down his baggage he was conscious of Shire's steady gaze, and of his father's head rising up behind the desk like that of a turtle.

"Oh, it's you, Alan. Anything you want? Mr. Shire and I are—ah—we are busy at present." As he spoke, he was shifting papers on the desk.

Briefly Alan explained why he had come and mentioned his New York address. "I came to say good-bye," he finished.

"Yes, I see." His father's manner was abstracted. "Well—good luck to you!" Though doubtless intended as a farewell salute, his gesture of the hand conveyed dismissal, and Alan, with a word of adieu, took up his bags and departed.

The discovery of Shire in the office left him disturbed. What could have brought him there? Evidently business. But what sort of business? What business could his father have with Shire? On his way to the ticket office, he turned the subject over in his mind but could find no satisfactory explanation.

In the excitement of departure, the problem was driven for a time from Alan's thoughts, but it came back to him that night when, after talking for a time with Colonel Burchard, he retired.

He had been shocked by his father's tolerant attitude toward the building of the flats next door, and he knew that this tolerance had astonished his grandfather. But that wasn't the worst of it; for after Zenas Wheelock went to Florida it became evident that Harris was still on good terms with Shire and Luke Holden. He had even gone to supper at Luke's house, and the Shires had been present. Alan, still burning with the injustice done by them to his grandfather, had regretted this. It seemed to him almost disloyal. However, he thought he could account for it. It was due, he believed, to Harris Wheelock's proverbial hatred of unpleasantnesses.

The nocturnal landscape, sweeping past, became in his imagination a swiftly flowing river, and the steady roar of the train was translated into an

orchestral harmony, background for a lively tune sung by the creaking of the car to the rapid, metrical drumming of the wheels. He closed his eyes and let his head fall back upon the pillows, listening. Now he almost knew the tune by heart. A gay tune. He must remember it. He would hum it to Blanche and see if she could learn to play it.

CHAPTER XXV

ALAN'S meeting with Blanche was not as he had imagined it. They met in a hotel parlour, chill and formal in spite of the sanguinary colouring of carpet and upholstery; for Colonel Burchard had invited Blanche and Ray to dinner.

His first thought was that she looked older. The picture of her he had carried in his mind was that of a young girl, whereas now, in a small velvet hat trimmed with ostrich plumes, and a dress that touched the floor, she was a woman. But the change was more than a mere change of costume. Her hazel eyes had lost the dreamy look that used to make him wonder in what far field her thoughts were roaming; they seemed brighter, more alert, and as, with a smile friendly yet appraising, they met his, he felt that everything he thought, everything he was, must be revealed to such an understanding gaze.

Ray greeted him with a clap on the back, exclaiming:

"Well, Old Sobersides, how did you like the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge?" And they laughed together as Alan admitted the accuracy of the guess as to his sightseeing.

"I thought we'd dine here," the Colonel said to Blanche, "unless there's some other restaurant you'd prefer." But before she could answer, Ray spoke up:

"Oh, let's go to the Waldorf, Grandpa. It's the newest place in town. Everybody's going there."

The Colonel glanced at him but continued to address Blanche, asking:

"Does the Waldorf suit you best, my dear?"

"Oh, any place suits me," she said; so they set forth, crossing Broadway and moving up Fifth Avenue, now brightly lighted and crowded with private turnouts, hansom cabs, and lumbering busses, their high-perched drivers kings of all wheeled traffic.

At first the four walked abreast, but Blanche and Alan presently dropped back, falling in behind the other pair, and she began to ask about little William. Was Florence taking good care of him? Did Alan think William still remembered her?

His answers were as encouraging as he could make them, and when they had spoken of his family, and Blanche had told him of her latest letter from Aunt Martha, she questioned him about himself. Did he regret leaving the university? Did he like his work? How was Leta? Was she as pretty as she used to be, and did he see her as much as ever? When he had answered these questions, she turned her head suddenly, gazing up into his face and asking: "Haven't you some news for me, Alan?" And when he looked at her blankly, she pursued: "I mean about Leta. Aren't you engaged yet?"

"I—I don't believe so."

"That tells me all I wanted to know," she said, smiling. "If you don't know whether you're engaged, you must be—or pretty near it."

"You *have* changed!" he told her; and as again

she looked at him, he added: "Two years ago, you weren't so foxy."

She became thoughtful, saying:

"It's queer to think that any one can live in a world and know as little about it as I did then."

"Or I."

"Yes," she said, "you're older, too. What has made you feel older? Business?"

"Partly that."

"Some other girl? Someone besides Leta?"

"Not exactly."

"That means yes. Tell me about her."

"I'm not proud of it," he began, and recounted to her the tale of his affair with Sophie, describing her, telling of her curious attraction for him, and how, against his judgment, he had gone to see her.

"I know," she said comprehendingly as he finished; and she added: "As long as it turned out the way it did, I think it was a good experience."

"Yes," he agreed, "I learned some lessons. And do you know, Blanche, the thing that surprised me most about it was the discovery that I could be so strongly attracted to a person I didn't respect."

"I know," she said again; and Alan looked at her quickly, wondering whether he had heard her sigh.

Later, looking back upon that uninterrupted talk, he was thankful for it. At dinner Ray monopolized the conversation, telling of successes with his work, of the position he had been offered on a newspaper, of his doubts about the advisability of accepting it, and his thought of going to Italy, where they would be

able to live cheaply and he could give all his time to writing stories and literary criticisms.

"If I were in your place," put in his grandfather, "I'd take the job." But Ray waved the advice aside:

"The trouble with a newspaper job," he replied, "is that there's no future to it. A man just slaves away until he's middle-aged, and then they drop him."

"They didn't drop Horace Greeley, or Dana, or Joseph Medill," remarked Colonel Burchard.

"Editors," said Ray, "—executives. I'd never be satisfied just writing editorials; I want to do more imaginative things. And besides, it looks to me as if any man who has a regular job is just a time-server. I want to be my own master."

Beneath his bushy gray brows the Colonel regarded his grandson sombrely.

"You can't be," he said.

"Why not?"

"No one ever is," replied the Colonel as he paid the check.

The following two weeks passed with incredible rapidity. The Colonel and Alan spent their days downtown with the bankers, and several times met with them in the evening, dining at their residences or at clubs.

"I want you to know these men and see how they do things," the Colonel said; and Alan, grateful for the opportunity, bent his thoughts to making himself useful to the conferees, dispatching telegrams, keep-

ing memoranda, taking care of files of papers, endeavouring to anticipate their calls for information on this point or that and have it ready.

The Colonel's negotiations were made more difficult by the disturbed state of business throughout the country, aftermath of the panic of the year before. New failures were daily reported; strikes were increasingly prevalent, and the papers were printing stories about an agitator, a man named Coxey, who in Ohio was gathering a mob of radicals and hoboes called an "army," at the head of which he proposed to march on Washington as a protest against the prevailing hard times. Because of these conditions, the Colonel's associates in Chicago had been none too confident that his mission would be successful, and his completion of arrangements for reorganizing and refinancing the Cozzens Pump Company was therefore the greater victory.

Riding uptown with his employer after the final conference, Alan knew that he was much pleased with his success, and he understood that the Colonel meant to signify that he was pleased with him as well, when, as they were packing preparatory to the journey home, he remarked:

"Mr. Broderick has noticed you, Alan."

John Broderick, president of C. V. A. Broderick & Co., a powerful banking and investment house established many years before by his father, had acted as unofficial chairman of the meetings; and Alan had observed him with the greater interest because he was a type so definite, so characteristic of New York. Like many men prominent in the finan-

cial district, he wore a frock coat, silk hat, and side-whiskers. The sidewhiskers were gray and resembled neatly balanced bulbs of shaving lather.

Upon learning that Alan was Zenas Wheelock's grandson Mr. Broderick had become cordial, and this afternoon, at parting, he had invited Alan to drop in and see him whenever he came to New York. Now, as the Colonel strapped his bag, Alan mentioned this; whereat the other nodded approvingly, declaring that the entrée to a man of Mr. Broderick's position could be a very valuable asset.

Their packing completed, the Colonel went to do some final shopping; and Alan, having deposited the baggage in the check room at Grand Central Station, took a street car for the upper West Side to bid farewell to Blanche.

The maid who answered his ring evidently was expecting him. "Mrs. Norcross says come right up," she announced; and Alan, ascending to the fourth floor, found Blanche awaiting him.

In the parlour of their little suite Ray, wearing a quilted bathrobe, was seated at a table, writing. "Have a drink?" He indicated a whisky bottle and a siphon at his elbow; and upon Alan's replying that he could stay but a moment, turned back to his work. Apparently, however, he could write with one lobe of his brain and listen with another, for as Blanche was giving Alan messages for her Chicago friends, Ray glanced up, remarking:

"How my parents have endured Chicago so long is more than I can see."

"I hear your father's interested in the new steel-

frame construction that's been developed out there," said Alan; and with a little smile he added: "Your mother was born in Chicago, you know, and incredible as it may seem, she likes it."

Ray gave a toss of the head, throwing the dark hair back from his forehead.

"You know perfectly well," he answered, "that anybody in Chicago would be delighted to move to New York. You would yourself." He cocked his head and raised his eyebrows.

"No, I'd hate to leave my friends."

"So would an old bullfrog in a puddle," said Ray, and resumed his writing.

"Don't forget that you have friends here, too," Blanche put in quickly.

"I don't forget it." For a moment they looked into each other's eyes.

Now came suddenly, from the street below, the inharmonious blare of a German band playing "Two Little Girls in Blue," the cornet shrilling against the flatulent *um-pa-pa* of the bass tuba.

With an angry exclamation Ray leaped from his chair, rushed with the siphon to the window, and raising the sash, discharged the contents at the earnest Teutons.

"Get out of here!" he shouted, as the music came to an abrupt stop. "Get out of here and don't you ever come back!" Drawing in his head, he closed the window and set the siphon on the table. "German bands by day and cats by night!" He raised his arms and let them drop in a dramatic gesture of

despair. "My God, how do they expect a man to do creative work!"

"I'm afraid I've broken in on your work, too," said Alan, rising.

"Oh, no." Ray dropped into his chair, drained off the remainder of his highball, and waved his hand in casual farewell as Alan moved across the room.

Blanche followed him, and at the head of the stairs they paused.

"It makes me homesick to see you go," she murmured; and after gazing at him for an instant, reached up and kissed his cheek. Returning the caress, Alan was aware of her husband's dark eyes fixed upon them.

"Parting is such sweet sorrow," Ray said drily, and the memory of his ironical smile lingered with Alan unpleasantly as he left the house and headed for the station.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN ORDER to achieve the refinancing of the Pump Company, Colonel Burchard had been obliged to accept the chairmanship of the new board of directors; and because of Alan's familiarity with details of the reorganization, the Colonel, soon after their return to Chicago, placed him on the company's payroll as assistant to the chairman.

In marked contrast to the placidity with which his father accepted the news of his appointment was Mrs. Purnell's voluble enthusiasm. She beamed at him, and seizing him by both arms, exclaimed: "How perfectly splendid! I couldn't be more delighted if you were my own son! With such a salary, you'll be able to keep on saving, and at the same time have more—more nice things. I'll never forget how fine Hector Cozzens looked in his frock coat, and——"

"Yes," put in Leta. "I was thinking of that, too. I'm so proud of you, I can't express it! And if you do decide to get a frock coat, remember it pays to go to a good tailor. Hector has all his clothes made by Hansen."

Though their enthusiasm pleased him, Alan was somewhat disconcerted by the alacrity with which they had translated his prosperity into terms of

clothing. Nevertheless it was true that his wardrobe was neither so extensive nor so fashionable as the wardrobes of some of his friends. Perhaps Leta and her mother were right. Pondering the matter he reached home that evening to find on the hall table a telegram from St. Augustine, and there was nothing to dim the glow of satisfaction with which he read the congratulations of his aunt and his grandfather.

Encouraged by Harris to take their time about returning, Zenas Wheelock and his daughter planned to make the homeward journey by easy stages, visiting various Southern cities on the way; and Harris, with an unwonted show of concern for his father's health, was already urging upon Martha the advisability of hurrying him direct to Mackinac, that he might avoid Chicago's summer heat. However, in the late spring, labour troubles, general throughout the country, spread to the works of the Pullman Palace Car Company, situated on the outskirts of Chicago, and when in June a general railroad strike appeared imminent, Alan suggested to his father that the travellers be advised to hasten their return. Finding Harris strongly opposed to the idea, he consulted Colonel Burchard, and upon learning that the latter agreed with him, reluctantly took matters into his own hands and telegraphed his aunt.

Events quickly proved the wisdom of his course. Zenas Wheelock and his daughter reached home barely in time to avoid a railroad strike which paralysed the transportation systems centring on Chicago. Nevertheless, Harris Wheelock remained

stubbornly resentful of Alan's action, and continually urged upon his father the immediate advantages of Mackinac, accessible by steamer.

"I do hope you'll go up the lake before the weather gets sweltering," he said one evening shortly after their homecoming, as after supper the family moved out to the side porch.

"We've spent a good deal of money this past winter," demurred the old man.

"Oh," said Harris, "we can afford to keep comfortable."

"I imagine it will be quite a while before the Pump Company pays dividends again," said his father.

"The Colonel hopes to begin in about a year," Alan put in.

"Well, anyway," said Harris, "you haven't much of that stock, and everything else is going well."

"Things keep on all right at Napier Place?"

"Yes—as I wrote you." And as if in recognition of their common feeling that Napier Place was a distasteful topic, Harris quickly changed the subject, speaking again of the pleasure his father would derive from revisiting his old haunts at Mackinac.

Presently sounded the distant jingle of the door-bell, and a moment later Delia announced a caller to see Alan. It proved to be Mr. Schoen. Alan found him standing under the lighted chandelier, in the hall, his bald head glistening like a piece of porcelain, the fingers of both hands working at the brim of a small straw hat held over his stomach. He did not reply when Alan greeted him, but with head

bent forward and brows elevated, stared at him over the tops of his spectacles; and when at last he spoke, his voice came in a low, accusing mutter:

"Where iss my daughter?"

Alan was nonplussed. "Why, I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Schoen," he answered. "How should I know where she is?"

With his watery blue eyes still fixed on Alan's face, the barber repeated in a rising tone:

"I tell you where iss my daughter?"

Clearly, he was wrought up, and Alan, annoyed though he was, made allowance for the fact.

"As I said before, Mr. Schoen," he answered crisply, "I haven't the slightest idea. Has she left home?"

Still peering doubtfully at Alan, Schoen nodded.

"How long has she been gone?"

To this the barber did not reply until the question was repeated, when for the first time his gaze left Alan's face.

"Two months," he muttered, looking at the carpet.

"Haven't you any idea where she is?"

Schoen looked up, demanding sullenly:

"What do you dink I came for?"

"I don't know what you came for, but if you want to stay, you'd better keep a civil tongue in your head!"

"Excuse me," said the other, suddenly becoming meek, and Alan was sorry he had spoken harshly.

"What made you think I'd know anything about it?" he inquired

"Sophie liked you."

"And I liked her. But I haven't seen her in a long time. About a year."

"Oh," said Schoen blankly, and started toward the front door.

"Wait a minute," Alan stopped him. "Let's talk this over and see if I can help you." He led the way to the parlour and lit the gas.

"Sit down, Mr. Schoen."

Still holding his hat against his stomach, the barber sank to a rigid sitting posture on the edge of a chair and entered upon a rambling discourse about the various positions Sophie had held, and the reasons she gave for losing them.

"De trouble vas," he said, "she'd get down late to work because she stait out late at nights. Ve tolt her and tolt her, but ve couldn't do nodding vit her. So I gif her good licking, and after dot she don't come back no more."

"You *licked* her?" Alan stared at the strange little man, visualizing the scene.

"Vot else could ve do?" He spoke defensively. "I tolt you ve couldn't do nodding vit her."

Perceiving that it would be useless, at this stage, to argue about Schoen's method of dealing with his daughter, Alan turned to a more practical aspect of the case, asking:

"Have you been to the police?"

"No, no, no!" Schoen was vehement. "Ve don't vant no police!"

"Why not?"

"I tell you ve don't vant no police! De police

gets everyding in de papers, and dot vay her gramma in Aurora vould find out."

"But you've got to *find* her! Do you realize that, if you don't find her, something horrible may happen to her?"

"Sure I realize! But her gramma's old—it vould kill her."

"Well, you can't be worrying about that now! There must be some way of getting the police to keep it quiet—in fact, I'm pretty sure we can fix it. Mr. Murphy, across the street, has a brother on the force—a captain. He's a very decent man—a friend of my grandfather's. I'll take you over to his house."

"No, no, no!" cried Schoen, jumping to his feet. "No police! De police iss a bad lot! Dey tell everyding to de papers!" And to Alan's assurance that Captain Murphy could be trusted he paid no heed, but moved quickly to the hall.

"Can't you get it through your head," demanded Alan, stopping him at the front door, "that it's your daughter you've got to think of, and not all these other people?"

"Think of her!" echoed Schoen, in a quavering voice. "*Think* of her! Vot haf ve been thinking of for two months—and her mamma crying all de time!" A tear formed on the lower lid of his left eye, and overflowing, streaked slowly down his wizened cheek.

Half pitying, half enraged at the blundering old man, Alan seized him by the lapels.

"For God's sake, man, be reasonable! What if the newspapers *should* find out? What vould that

matter, compared with getting her back? I can guarantee that Captain Murphy won't tell the papers. Come along, now—show your good sense and let me take you to see him! He lives only a few blocks——”

With a jerk, the force of which surprised Alan, the barber pulled away from him.

“Don't you be telling me vat to do!” he exclaimed, retreating through the doorway. “I know vat to do and vat not to do! I know my business as goot as anypoty, see?” With an angry shake of the head, he swung around and stamped across the porch.

But at the steps he turned, a figure once more meek and pitiful.

“Excuce me,” he begged. “Stanting all tay by my chair I git tired. I guess to-night I don't feel very good.” He hesitated, the muscles of his face working as he endeavoured to keep back the tears.

“If maybe some day you see her, tell her Mamma's sick, and pleace, pleace vould she come home. Tell her”—he hesitated—“tell her if she come back I don't lick her no more.”

CHAPTER XXVII

FOR Alan, the summer passed rapidly. His work at the Pump Company absorbed him; business experience of varied kinds came at him with a rush that sometimes threatened to overwhelm him; yet Colonel Burchard continually gave him new responsibilities. Often, when obliged to make a quick decision, Alan felt like a chess-player hurried into an ill-considered move, and there were times when he wondered whether any amount of experience would equip him with the calm, sound judgment the Colonel continually exhibited. Now and then, to his great annoyance, he made mistakes; but the Colonel seemed undisturbed by them.

"If a man is any good," he said to Alan as they were driving home one Saturday afternoon from the plant, "I believe in giving him all the responsibility he will take. And every man who accepts responsibility is bound to make mistakes. His object should be to avoid making the same one twice."

Rounding the corner of the block on which they lived, they were hailed by Mr. Dunham, who in his buggy drew up beside them.

"I'm just going out to Washington Park," he told the Colonel, "to see McLean and some of his friends play that game he's been talking so much about. Won't you come along?"

"Doing anything this afternoon, Alan?" the Colonel asked; and as Alan had no plans—Leta having gone to Wisconsin for two weeks—they continued to the park, where, upon a lawn, now more yellow than green, their neighbour Mr. McLean and several other gentlemen were gathered.

"The name of the game," elucidated the Colonel, "is golf. It's spelled *g-o-l-f*, but they don't pronounce the *l*. I saw it in Scotland some years ago, and now they've begun to play it around New York. I see they're even going to have a tournament somewhere in the East this year."

He tied his horses, and with Alan crossed over to the little group, each member of which was equipped with a tubular bag containing sticks with heads of various shapes, some of wood, some of metal. Mr. McLean produced a small white ball which Alan examined, and when, returning it, he asked if golf resembled shinny, the Scot was scandalized.

Presently the game started. Each successive player perched his little ball on a small pile of earth, and with a swift swing of the club drove it toward a point some three hundred yards distant, marked by a handkerchief fluttering from an upright stick. He then followed the ball, and coming up with it selected from his bag a club designed to meet the condition in which the ball chanced to lie, and drove it forward again, his object being to get it into a condensed milk can, sunk in the ground where the stick stood. One of the gentlemen had brought a lawnmower, and with this the grass, for a distance of ten or fifteen feet around the sunken can, had been cut close, per-

mitting the ball to roll freely when given the final tap with a club called a "putter." The player making the distance with the fewest strokes was the victor so far as this particular covering of the distance was concerned; but the thing had to be gone through with many times in order to make a full game, and one of the gentlemen explained that, for a proper demonstration, at least eight more cans should be sunk at various points, so that instead of going repeatedly over the same ground, the players might proceed for several miles, meeting new conditions and new obstacles.

Mr. McLean presently placed a club in Colonel Burchard's hands and after coaching him in the manner of holding it, the manner of standing, the manner of swinging, and even the position in which the swing should be completed, put down a ball for him to hit. Alan gathered that the Colonel was not greatly interested, but when, in spite of the terrific smash he gave it, the ball rolled only a few feet, his pride was piqued; again and again he tried, and at last succeeded in sending a shot sailing through the air.

He spoke of it as they drove down Drexel Boulevard, among the bicycles, at sunset.

"To feel the club hit with a click and see the ball soar, gives a curiously pleasurable sensation," he admitted to Alan. "Still, I can't believe the game will ever become popular. It isn't lively enough, and it requires expensive grounds.

"You see," he continued, "all games are fads. Young as you are, you have seen games come and go

—croquet, tiddledewinks, and crokinole, for instance. Just now there's a rage for tennis and for pigs-in-clover; to-morrow it will be something else."

"Do you think the bicycle a fad, too?" asked Alan, looking down the broad, smooth reach of highway with its endless stream of safeties.

The Colonel shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he replied. "The bicycle is inexpensive and utilitarian. I fear it has come to stay."

He had hardly spoken when a dozen or more scorchers overtook and passed them, laughing and shouting, their bodies bent to drooping handle-bars.

An expression of strong disapproval crossed the Colonel's face. "Look at that!" he exclaimed. "Bloomers! Two or three years ago both those girls would have been arrested for appearing in such a costume. That's where the bicycle is a menace to society—badly brought up young men and young women riding off together, anywhere and everywhere! It makes one wonder what this younger generation is coming to!"

At the Wheelocks' carriage block, he drew up, and Alan, alighting, entered the house. On the hall table were two letters: one from Leta, the other—in an envelope bearing a picture of the hotel at Mackinac—from his grandfather. At supper that evening he was alone, his father having failed to put in an appearance; but Delia, waiting on him, tried to keep him entertained. When she was not carrying dishes to or from the kitchen, she stood by the table giving him the gory details of yesterday's murder.

Kindly old Delia greatly enjoyed murders; rising

early, she would see the morning paper first, and would be ready to discuss the latest crime news when the family appeared at breakfast. Similarly, the evening paper prepared her, conversationally, for supper, though this tendency of hers was resolutely discouraged by Martha Wheelock. Now, however, with Alan at table alone, she felt free to indulge her taste for homicidal discourse.

"He grabbed up her husband's ra-azor, an' he cut her throat from ear to ear," she told Alan, setting before him his dessert—a tremulous blanc mange covered with crushed raspberries, fluid and crimson. "They say the pillow was soaked with blood and the flure was——"

"For goodness' sake, Delia!" Alan pushed back his unfinished dessert, rose from the table, and in spite of Delia's protest that lately he hadn't been eating enough, left the room, moving to the library, where he dropped into his grandfather's easy chair and took up the story he was reading.

The tale of Trilby, the beautiful artist's model, with the perfect foot, and the exquisite voice produced under Svengali's hypnotic spell, so entertained him that he abandoned a half-formed plan to attend a hop, this evening, at the Hyde Park Hotel. Without Leta, he reflected, he wouldn't have much fun there anyway. How glad he was that one of the two weeks of her absence was past!

Having read for a time, he crossed to the desk and wrote to Leta. A gentle breeze from the lake stirred the long lace curtains at the windows; the air was balmy, and outside he saw a silvery blueness that

told him of the rising moon. He rose and stood in the window gazing out upon the shimmering street. A glorious August night! He would stroll over to the post office and mail his letter.

It was cool for this time of year, he reflected as he walked along. In Mackinac it would be chilly; they would be sleeping under blankets. The summer would soon be over, and they would be coming home again.

The little shops at the Corners were dark; even the drug store was closed, though the gas was burning in the window behind the great crystal urns filled with liquid, red and green. Having dropped the letter through the slot in the post-office door he turned back.

At the Shires's corner he was hesitating, half inclined to continue to the foot of the street and see the moonlight on the lake, when from the stoop behind him came the sound of voices uttering good-nights. Turning, he saw someone coming down the Shires's steps, and the moment the figure passed from the shadow of the buildings he recognized his father.

His greeting seemed to startle Harris.

"Why, what are you doing out here?" he asked. "I thought you were going to a hop."

"I changed my mind," said Alan; and after walking a few steps beside his father, he added: "I guess you weren't as much surprised to see me as I was to see you—coming out of *that* place."

But Harris seemed to be engaged with his own thoughts. At all events, he did not answer.

CHAPTER XXVIII

UPON Zenas Wheelock's return from Mackinac that autumn, sittings for a portrait were begun, and the library became for a time a studio. Alan was sorry that the portrait had not been attempted earlier, for in the last year his grandfather had lost something of his old-time vigour. True, he continued to take daily exercise, but his walks were shorter than they used to be, and sometimes, while posing for the painter, he would fall asleep.

Besides the gift for catching a likeness, the young painter had a high appreciation of his subject as a native type. The canvas showed Zenas Wheelock in his upholstered armchair, by the library table, with his steel-rimmed spectacles between his strong old fingers, and in his lap a calf-bound volume—Lockman's translation of Voltaire's "Henriade." His attitude gave a feeling that, as he was settling down to read, someone had entered the room and spoken to him, for his eyes were uplifted, and their characteristic expression, kindly, alert, and slightly humorous, had been faithfully transcribed.

In the early winter exhibition at the new Art Institute, the portrait was prominently hung, and upon the closing of the exhibition it was moved to the recently completed building of the Historical

Society, where it was displayed at a reception held in Zenas Wheelock's honour.

Snow fell throughout the day of the reception, floating down in feathery flakes, large and damp, to deepen the slush with which the streets were swimming. Because of the weather Zenas Wheelock and his daughter made the long trip to the North Side in a closed carriage, and when, a little after six o'clock, they left the Historical Society and began the drive home, Colonel Burchard and Alan, who had come over from their office, accompanied them.

"Well, Father, how did you enjoy yourself?" asked Martha as the carriage bowled down Rush Street.

"It was a great pleasure to see so many old friends." His deep voice coming from the dark corner at her side sounded weary. "There were men and women there whom I shall not see again."

"Don't say that, Father."

"It's as it should be," he replied. "Our work is done. Look at these lighted streets. We're a great city now. Hard to realize that within half a mile of this place I have traded with the Indians, taking their peltries in exchange for blankets, ammunition, kettles, and ear-bobs. In 1828, I recollect, we brought them jew's-harps, and Dufour taught them to play." He became silent, but his thoughts evidently continued to revolve around old trading days, for after some minutes he went on:

"Dufour was a better fiddler than old John Kinzie; always there were dancing parties as soon as he got here. A discharged soldier played the fife,

and another the drum. You can't imagine the mixed crowd—an officer in uniform dancing with McKee's half-breed wife; and the officer's wife, fresh from the East in her silks and satins, paired off with a French Canadian in a buckskin shirt, or a carter with his trousers tucked into his boots."

He relapsed into silence, and when, after their long drive across the city, they entered the lighted house, fatigue showed plainly in his face. However, he went in with the family to supper and later moved as usual to the library and took up a book, but only to fall to dozing over it. When presently the door-bell jingled he stirred slightly but did not open his eyes; as his grandson, answering the summons, tip-toed from the room.

Opening the front door, Alan found a bulky figure standing in the semi-darkness of the porch, and it was only when the caller stepped into the hall that he recognized him as Frank Murphy's uncle, the captain of police.

"Is your grandfather in?" he asked; and upon Alan's affirmative reply, took off his dark blue cap and brass-buttoned overcoat and shook them out of the door to get rid of the damp snow before hanging them on the hall rack. The Captain, like his brother, had come from Ireland as a child, and the faint trace of brogue in his speech was pleasing. Alan showed him into the parlour, lighted the gas, and left him enthroned like a huge Buddha in the straight-backed chair on which, last summer, Sophie's father had sat uneasily

"Good-evening, sir—good-evening, sir." Captain

Murphy rose as Zenas Wheelock entered, and with a genial air suggesting that of a host rather than a visitor, offered a vast hand. "I'll just close this door," Alan heard him say, and for some time thereafter the only sound from the parlour audible to Alan and his aunt, in the library, was the faint rumble of the two deep voices.

After a while, the door opened part way.

"Harris!" called Zenas Wheelock in a tone sharp as the crack of a whip.

"Father's out," Alan called back; whereupon the door closed again, and the rumble of voices continued.

When, after a time, the two men returned to the hall, Alan was astonished to see Captain Murphy assisting his grandfather into his overcoat.

"I'm obliged to go downtown on a matter of business," the old man announced hurriedly, and the expression of his face was such that Martha rose quickly and hastened to his side.

"But, Father—it's such an awful night!"

"That's what I was telling him," put in the policeman earnestly; and turning to Zenas Wheelock, who had dropped into a chair and was drawing on his storm rubbers, he urged: "Why not let it go until to-morrow?"

The other seemed hardly to hear. Rising he stamped his feet into the rubbers and took his hat from the rack.

"I may be late," he said over his shoulder. "Don't sit up for me."

"Please, Father," Martha began, but he cut her off, declaring:

"I must act at once."

"Look here, Grandpa," Alan broke in, "can't I go instead?" He reached for his ulster, but his grandfather, with a hand upon the doorknob, quickly faced about.

"Do me the favour to stay with your aunt," he replied in a tone admitting of no argument, and followed by the Captain, went quickly out.

Still holding his coat, Alan turned to Martha.

"Auntie, what can it be, taking him downtown at this time of the night?"

With anxious eyes, she stood for a moment gazing at him.

"Napier Place!" Her whisper was sharp with prescience.

Could she be right? And if she was right, what did it mean? There came to him a sudden memory of the day when he had found Shire in his father's office. Last summer, he had met his father coming out of Shire's house. He had never heard his grandfather's voice sound as it did to-night when he opened the parlour door and called for his son.

"That's it!" he said. "Something has broken loose down there, and I'll bet you Shire's at the bottom of it!"

"Shire?" she repeated. "I don't see what Shire has to do with it."

"I don't exactly, either," he admitted. "Not yet."

"But," she began, "how could——"

"He's managed somehow to bamboozle Father," Alan broke in. "That's it. You'll see!" He

was drawing on his ulster. "What's the number of the house?"

"Twelve. You aren't going there? Oh, Alan, I loathe the thought of your going into that neighbourhood!"

"Don't you fret, Auntie; I can take care of myself. And some member of the family ought to be with him. You and Grandpa don't realize that I've grown up." He threw his arm around her shoulders, kissed her on the cheek, and hurried out, hoping to catch up with his grandfather at Oakland station. But the train had gone, and it was after ten when, having reached the city, he started toward the forbidden thoroughfare.

Where Napier Place was, and what it was, he now knew well. From the business street crossing its northern extremity, he had often glanced down it as he passed, noting rows of houses, many of them substantial in appearance, interspersed with low shacks and saloons.

In contrast to adjacent thoroughfares, alive with traffic, Napier Place by day appeared curiously deserted. The shades of the houses were drawn, the shutters closed; an occasional brewery truck or grocery wagon, rattling over the cobblestones, seemed to intrude unwarrantably upon the solitude, and the few pedestrians walked hurriedly, as if eager to round the first corner.

Boys who in Alan's schooldays used to stand apart and snicker over cigarette pictures of extravaganza queens in tights, grew up to snicker over Napier Place and its more conspicuous establishments—

Hattie Le Jeune's, Vonnies Landon's, and the notorious Josie's. Some of the young men boasted of nocturnal excursions "down the line," and had carried sightseeing so far as to call at various resorts and buy rounds of beer; and a few of the more knowing ones, evidently anxious to be considered rakes, let fall sly hints, inviting speculation on the part of other youths, as to just how dissolute their conduct in the district may have been.

These hints and stories had aroused in Alan a dim curiosity, but his curiosity was more than counterbalanced by an aversion similar to that he used to feel for the Chamber of Horrors at the Eden Musée; and this aversion, coupled with the knowledge of his grandfather's chagrin over the degradation of the neighbourhood in which he used to live, had caused him to avoid the street.

To-night, intent on the task of locating his grandfather, he gave hardly a thought to the character of Napier Place as he turned into it; but he had proceeded only a few steps when he became acutely conscious of the change in his surroundings. The street he left behind derived a kind of sordid brightness from the illuminated windows of saloons, cheap restaurants, tiny drug stores and pawnbrokers' shops, but on Napier Place even the saloons looked dim, and the street lamps, far apart, glowed feebly through the falling snow. At the curb stood a pair of ancient four-wheelers, the blanketed horses drooping, while the hackmen, in the shelter of a near-by wall, stamped their feet in the slush.

"Want to see the town, boss?"

Alan had moved but a little farther when his attention was attracted by a sharp ticking sound at his side. Turning, he saw a woman rapping with a coin on the glass panel of a door flush with the sidewalk's edge; the faint light within revealed her insinuating smile, its significance emphasized by a beckoning finger.

A cab splattered past, the raucous voice of a passenger raised in song:

“Razzle-dazzle, razzle-bazzle,
Drunk as I am, I don't give a damn!”

Halfway along the block the vehicle drew up, and several men, alighting, entered a house. Up and down the street other dark overcoated figures were continually ascending to front doors which, opening, emitted shafts of light and a harsh jangle of pianos.

Above the doors large numbers were displayed upon illuminated transoms, but the windows of the houses were discreetly curtained, showing merely a faint glow around the edges of drawn shades or between the parallel interstices of inner shutters. However, no effort at concealment could hide the fact that this short thoroughfare, by day so silent and deserted, had come to life under cover of the darkness; and Alan, proceeding on his way, was struck by the thought that the furtive prowlers here resembled cockroaches in an untidy kitchen.

Unlike the other houses, Number Twelve stood a little way back from the street, the open space about it surrounded by tall billboards. It was a double

house with bay windows at each side, and the darkness was not sufficient to obliterate its look of dilapidated dignity. A cat darted across his path as he approached the steps and like a shadow melted into the blackness of the basement areaway.

At his ring, the door opened slightly, and the face of a Negro maid showed in the aperture.

"Can't let nobody in to-night," she said in a low voice, and was about to close the door when Alan shouldered past her.

"You bettuh git out *quick!*" With an expressive thumb she pointed over her shoulder to a pair of arched doors, adding in a hoarse whisper: "De police's in de pahlor wid de madam."

"That's all right. It's Captain Murphy I want to see."

"Oh, 'scuse me, suh!" She smiled ingratiatingly, as if to placate a detective.

Through an atmosphere stale with the combined smells of tobacco smoke, perfumery, and beer, he moved to the double doorway and rapped, aware, as he did so, of several women peering down at him from the semi-obscurity of the stair landing.

Almost immediately Captain Murphy opened the door, and Alan found himself looking into a spacious chamber, with wall paper and hangings of florid red. At the far side of the room, still wearing his overcoat, his grandfather was seated in a gilded chair, talking with a slim little woman dressed in black, who was sitting at one end of an enormous sofa upholstered in red plush. She was perhaps forty years of age, with small features and a close-curved bang,

and her appearance was so neat and ladylike that Alan wondered what she could be doing here.

On sight of him his grandfather half rose.

"My boy! My boy!" His voice was distressed. "I told you not to come!"

"I felt I ought to, Grandpa." Alan slipped out of his ulster, threw it over a chair, and crossed to the old man. "Let me take your coat—it's hot in here."

But Zenas Wheelock shook his head.

"Sit over there," he said with a sigh, indicating a chair in the far corner.

Since entering the room, Alan had been aware of the shrewd gaze of the little woman on the sofa, who, as he sat down, resumed her conversation with his grandfather.

"Then, as I understand it," she said, "you're willing to reimburse me for the extra expense."

"For repairs and decorations, yes," he replied. "That is, assuming you are out, furniture and all, to-morrow."

"That's going to be hard to do on such short notice," she said reflectively.

"Not so darn hard for anybody with your ability, Josie," put in Captain Murphy.

"Thanks for the compliment, Captain." She flashed him an ironical smile and turned back to Zenas Wheelock.

"As I see it, Mr. Wheelock, your real trouble isn't with me at all. It's with W. J. Shire. If he disobeyed instructions, that's not my fault. I was acting in good faith, and my lease is——"

"Look here, Josie," the Captain interjected, "as

I told you before, there's no use trying to come anything like that on us. Not for a minute! You're a smart woman, and you know mighty well that Mr. Wheelock is treating you a whole lot better than he needs to."

"I don't say he isn't, but my lease——"

"You'd better just forget that lease," advised the policeman drily. "There's no call for Mr. Wheelock to pay you a nickel. He's just doing it out of the kindness of his heart. You're in big luck that we didn't raid you, and nobody knows that better than you."

She was thoughtful for a moment.

"Well, then——" she began; and the Captain, without waiting for her to finish, made his own inference.

"Good girl! That's the stuff! There's no use bucking the game."

"I know it," she returned.

"Are all the men out of the house?"

"I'll see." She rose and moved toward the hall, but he stopped her.

"Don't bother. I'll just have a look around myself."

"You're welcome to," she answered coolly, and sat down again.

At the door the Captain paused, asking: "You won't mind waiting a few minutes, Mr. Wheelock?" And upon the old man's nod, he left the room.

The ensuing silence was broken by Josie.

"Maybe you gentlemen would join me in a glass of wine?" she suggested politely, looking from one to

the other; and her air of playing hostess under these circumstances struck Alan as infinitely grotesque.

"No, I thank you, ma'am." Zenas Wheelock, whose reply plainly included Alan, did not look at her as he spoke; he was gazing at the marble mantel-piece, and the abstracted expression of his eyes told his grandson that for him the room was peopled with figures of the past. Alan wondered if the woman knew that in the happier days of the old mansion Abraham Lincoln had sat beside this fireplace. And if she did know, did she care?

Slowly the old man rose.

"If you've no objections, ma'am," he said, "I'd like to look at the library."

"The library?"

"The room on the other side of the hall," he explained.

"Oh!" Now she understood. "Why, certainly."

Still with the look of abstraction on his face, he moved across the room and through the double doorway; and Alan, watching him, found his eyes suddenly moist.

"Horrible weather we're having." Josie's voice, politely conversational, broke in upon Alan's meditations. "Horrible weather to move in. If I had only myself to think of I'd put my furniture in storage and go South, but with things the way they are there's nothing for me to do but just move back to my old place. I could afford to close up, but it wouldn't be fair to my girls."

"Fair?" repeated Alan.

"Yes, they're a great responsibility." She sighed.

"It isn't as if they were an ordinary lot of girls. I've never tolerated drunkenness, drugs, or strong language, and in my eighteen years in the business there's been just one robbery under my roof, and that girl's doing time. Often—like now, when things aren't going right—I feel like quitting the business, but if I was to do that what would become of my girls? Without a firm hand over them most of them would just go to the dogs."

To Alan's relief, the heavy tread of Captain Murphy now sounded on the carpeted stairs, and his entrance, a moment later, made a reply unnecessary.

"All clear upstairs," he remarked laconically, "but one of the girls says she wants to go home. My uniform kind of scared her, I guess. Pretty blonde girl, second floor back."

"Yvonne," said Josie, nodding. "Yes, she can go. You know *me*, Captain—I wouldn't think of keeping any girl that doesn't want to stay."

"That's right," he conceded amiably. "As folks down here go, you're not a half bad lot." He turned to Alan. "I guess we might as well be moving along. Where's your grandfather?"

"In the other room."

The Captain took up his heavy blue overcoat, and as Alan moved to help him into it, the stairway, with its red carpet and massive railing of black walnut, came within his range of vision. From the dimly lighted landing above, a girl was descending. When he first caught sight of her, the upper portion of her body was not visible, being hidden by the line of the hall ceiling, but he saw that she was carrying a coat

and a travelling-bag, and as with each downward step she came more into view, he had a startled sense of something familiar in the contours of her figure and the lazy grace with which she moved. From the brim of her dark hat hung a gray veil thick enough to conceal her features even if she had not kept her face averted. On emerging from the shadow that obscured the upper stairs, she moved more rapidly, and she had reached the bottom of the flight and was heading for the front door when Alan, standing at the entrance to the parlour, called to her:

“Sophie!”

Her step seemed for the briefest instant to falter, but she did not turn.

“Sophie!” he cried again, and started after her, but the door slammed in his face.

Turning back, he found the other two regarding him, a speculative frown shadowing the Captain’s features, while Josie wore a faint quizzical smile.

“Isn’t that girl’s name Sophie Schoen?” he demanded.

Josie gave a little shrug, saying:

“As far as I’m concerned, her name’s Yvonne.”

“She looked just like a girl I knew at business college,” Alan told them. “She ran away from home, and they’ve been hunting for her.”

The Captain glanced questioningly at Josie.

“Oh,” she exclaimed with an impatient shake of the head, “as long as she’s gone home, what does it matter what her name is!”

Angered by her perversity, yet understanding that some curious conception of underworld honour

was involved, Alan stood looking for a moment into her defiant eyes; then, perceiving that her temper was wearing thin, and that further argument at this juncture would be futile, he turned to what had been the library, and called his grandfather.

"Good-night, gentlemen," said the proprietress as the three moved out of the house. To which Captain Murphy, pausing in the vestibule, replied:

"I think I better station a couple of my men on you, Josie, just to make sure."

"Suit yourself," she answered in a weary tone, and closed the door.

CHAPTER XXIX

IT WAS no longer snowing when the three men left Josie's door and turned into Napier Place, but the temperature had dropped, and the slush on the sidewalks was congealing under an icy wind from the lake.

"What do you say we take a hack, Mr. Wheelock?" proposed the sturdy captain of police as, rounding the first corner, they encountered the gale; and Alan, remembering that his grandfather had sat for an hour in Josie's overheated parlour without removing his overcoat, quickly seconded the suggestion—but to no avail.

"You two ride, if you like," the old man answered. "I'll walk." And there was a note of apology in his tone as he explained: "I feel the need of air."

Nevertheless, upon reaching the railway station, he seemed glad to stand by the heater, and when presently they took their seats in the suburban train, Alan noticed with alarm that he was trembling. He felt a trifle chilly, he admitted, but he'd be all right when he got home. Leaning back he closed his eyes as if to discourage further talk upon the subject, and Alan turned to Captain Murphy.

"I've been waiting," he said, "for a chance to ask you how all this happened to break loose to-night."

"Reform wave," explained the policeman drily, and he went on to tell Alan that a group of citizens, shocked by the open reign of vice, had been investigating the titles to properties in the Napier Place district, and were planning to publish a roll of dishonour made up of the names of owners, agents, and proprietors of disreputable resorts. In scanning the list, Captain Murphy had been amazed to find the name of Zenas Wheelock.

"For years past," he said, "your grandfather has come around to headquarters every little while complaining about conditions down there. He's been to see every mayor we've had, and every chief of police since I've been on the force, but you know how these things go. When I saw him listed with that gang I knew there was a mistake. Shire was down as his agent—his firm handles a lot of those properties—and I knew that wasn't right, either, for my brother had told me Mr. Wheelock had no more use for Shire than I've got—and that's blamed little! So I thought I'd just run in and see him before these reformers got into print with their story." He shook his head ominously, adding: "I tell you, if that list is ever printed, it's going to raise the devil in this town!" And he continued to discuss reform and reformers until they reached Oakland, where Alan and his grandfather alighted from the train.

On reaching the house, Alan prepared hot lemonade and carried it upstairs to his grandfather, who was already in bed. The lemonade was fine, he declared gratefully; it went right to the spot; yes, he was nice and warm now. Alan felt less troubled as

he bade him good-night, but next morning he heard him coughing; and though the old man came down as usual to breakfast, Martha, acting on the doctor's order, presently persuaded him to return to bed.

Before doing so, he went upstairs and awakened Harris, in whose room the two remained for some time closeted. Neither Alan nor his aunt ever learned precisely what passed between them, but from their subsequent demeanour it was apparent that Zenas Wheelock had forgiven his son.

Harris's contrition was painful to see. At the first opportunity, he explained the case to Martha and Alan. During his father's absence in Florida, Shire had come to him, expressing deep regret at the annoyance caused Zenas Wheelock by the building of the flats next door. Shire told Harris that he was seeking an opportunity to make amends; if Harris would put the Napier Place property in his hands, he would find respectable tenants at a substantial rent.

Harris admitted to them that he had always thought the neighbourhood unduly harsh in criticizing Shire. Knowing that his father was suspicious of the real-estate man, he had determined not to mention the transaction until Shire himself should call and effect a reconciliation.

"The long and short of it is that I've been made a fool of!" he declared bitterly; and that evening, instead of working as usual over his books, he sat brooding beside the fire in the library, while from upstairs came at intervals the sound of his father's racking cough.

For the next few days Zenas Wheelock seemed

satisfied to doze, or listen to Martha reading aloud. Now and then he would speak of St. Augustine, saying that when he got over this little cold, he would go there again; and because of this nostalgia for the South, he submitted meekly to visits from the doctor, whom invariably he greeted with the statement that he felt much better. Not until the physician casually mentioned two or three weeks as the time he must remain indoors did he become rebellious. Medical men were fussy, he declared; to say that he was not yet well enough to make the journey South was nonsense. Early one morning, Martha found him up and dressed, insisting that after breakfast, he was going down to buy the tickets; and it was only by vigorous argument that she persuaded him to return to bed.

He was hardly under the covers before a severe chill seized him. The doctor, hurrying over, found his temperature high; and when that afternoon he talked again of going South, his thoughts were confused, and he spoke as if the journey were to be made aboard his uncle's ship, the old *Hyperion*.

In the days that followed, his mind was generally clear, but now and then came fevered fancies in which he imagined himself conversing with Dufour and other comrades of his fur-trading days, or that he was living in the old house on Napier Place with his wife and his son Lyman.

A "practical" nurse had been called in, but the patient liked to have the members of his family about him, and so they took turns sitting by his bed, talking or reading to him. One night, as Alan was

leaving the sickroom, his grandfather called him back, and looking up from a pillow hardly whiter than his face, gravely addressed him.

"Lyman, my son," he said, "remember that in you the hopes of this family are centred."

"I'll do my best, sir," Alan promised quickly; and the old man, contented, closed his eyes.

Next day, when Leta sent him flowers, he told Alan to thank her and added that he himself would soon write to her. Colonel Burchard's daily calls pleased him, and he never tired of hearing, from the Colonel, anecdotes illustrative of Alan's growing capacity for business. Blanche's letters invariably were read to him, and upon the news that she and Ray were sailing for Europe to be gone several years, he asked Martha to telegraph his blessings and his love.

But most of all he thought of Florida. One afternoon, at twilight, when the room was growing dim, he turned on his pillow, saying:

"I'll be ready to go in a day or two now."

"Yes, Father." Martha averted her face.

For a time he was silent; then:

"Since we shall be away so long," he said, "I've been thinking we might sell the cow."

"Yes, we could do that." She found it difficult to speak.

"It's getting dark," he said; whereupon she rose and lighted the gas, and he fell to telling her about a beaded buckskin shirt he had bought of a squaw and given to Dufour.

When Alan came in that evening, he met Delia in

the lower hall. She had just come from his grandfather's room, where she had tried unsuccessfully to tempt his appetite with a cup of broth, and she was weeping. "It's the look av him," she explained, wiping her eyes with the corner of her blue-checked apron. "He's changed for the wor-rse."

"What makes you think so?"

"It's in his eyes," she said, "like he was seein'—like he could see into the wor-rld beyand. Oh, I'm afeared! I know that look, and I'm tellin ye——" She broke off; a suspicious expression crossed her features, and she inhaled sharply. "Mother o' Mercy, me bread's burnin'!" she cried, and raced for the kitchen.

Slowly Alan mounted the stairs. This little episode with Delia, he reflected, was like an allegory of life. Inexorable as time and tide, the routine of a household must go on. Let the heart be filled with joy or with sorrow, let the eyes be filled with laughter or with tears, bread must bake and must not burn.

Moving along the upper hall, he heard his grandfather's cough; but when he entered the room, he found the sick man lying peacefully with one hand resting on the coverlet, his eyes uplifted with the intent gaze of one who sees into life's profoundest mysteries.

After standing for a time in silence beside the bed, Alan touched the blue-veined hand, and as the eyes, still with the look of wonder in them, turned to his, he pressed the hand, and in a voice as cheerful as he could muster, asked:

"Feeling better to-night, Grandpa?"

A gentle smile lighted the old seamed face, and the right eyebrow, white as a wintry hedge, rose whimsically.

"Whip my weight in wildcats."

The faintly whispered words were the last that Zenas Wheelock ever spoke.

CHAPTER XXX

FROM the time Alan left the house on the day of the funeral, until his return at twilight, there was but one moment when the full sense of loss broke through upon him, and that was when the minister, standing beside the open grave, let fall a handful of frozen earth which struck with a hollow rattle upon the pine box below. A few yards distant, partly hidden by a fir tree, he glimpsed a pair of labourers skulking with their spades. "*Dust to dust.*" Rebellion, rising in him, choked and blinded him. The black-clad figure of his aunt, at his side, became a blur.

The earth was shovelled in, and presently he found himself in the carriage with his father and his aunt. On the long drive home through streets rutted with frozen mud, the three conversed on unimportant subjects, mentioning people they had noticed at the church, and friends far away to whom they must write or send newspaper clippings. Harris's sombre costume accentuated the colourlessness of his face; he gazed vacantly through the carriage window, and would have remained silent but for his sister's determined effort to keep up a conversation, manifestly with the purpose of diverting their thoughts.

"When the weather gets mild, I think we'd better paint the house," she said as they drew up at the

carriage block. "And the honeysuckle is getting altogether too thick. Jason must trim it back."

Alan preceded the others up the walk, and opened the front door.

"I told Delia to have tea ready when we got home." Martha moved toward the library, but at the threshold Alan saw her hesitate, and knew that the sight of her father's chair had unnerved her.

That evening, for the first time since Zenas Wheelock's illness, the jingle of Delia's supper bell resounded, signaling the re-establishment of family life. Thereafter, breakfast, luncheon, supper, revolved in their customary cycles; but without the head of the family the table seemed deserted, and in the library his chair—his more than ever by reason of its emptiness—accentuated an absence that filled the house like a soundless echo.

The tall mahogany secretary in the corner of the library contained a mass of papers, and in sorting them Martha found a certain solace; such papers as were of special interest she would show to Alan and his father, and the three would discuss the disposition to be made of them.

Documents more or less impersonal, relating to the fur trade, the settlement of Illinois, early paths of travel, the Winnebago and Black Hawk wars, the great fire of 1839, the cholera epidemic ten years later, the Civil War and the Chicago Fire, were sent to the Historical Society, as were also several old maps—one showing Oakland in the days when it was known as Cleaverville, with Thirty-eighth Street set down as "Pier Street," and a post office

and general store indicated at the corner of Lake Avenue; another of Chicago in 1833 when there were less than fifty houses in the town; and still another which Zenas Wheelock himself had drawn, showing the route he had followed on a voyage by canoe from Lake Michigan to St. Louis, by way of the Chicago Portage and the Des Plaines and Illinois rivers

Family letters preserved by the old man were set aside for Alan. The earliest of them, dating from before the days of envelopes and postage stamps, had been folded and sealed with wax wafers; the ink was brown with age, and the phrasing and spelling were often quaint. One written by Zenas Wheelock's grandmother in the spring of 1814 referred to his grandfather's privateers engaged in war against England; and in another, dated at Marseilles a few years later, his Uncle Ichabod made laconic mention of an encounter with Portuguese pirates. Still others, of later period, were from Zenas Wheelock's wife, and from his children, and he had also saved childish letters written to him by Alan and Blanche. Reading these, Alan fell into a mood of tender reminiscence. How long it seemed since he had dug caves, built shanties, and fallen out of trees! The very ground in which the old oaks used to grow, the ground where he used to build and burrow, was covered now with buildings of brick and stone.

"Blanche will be touched to know he kept her letters," he remarked to his aunt when he had read the last of them.

"Yes, I've been thinking she might like to have them back."

But before the little bundle of letters was sent to Blanche, who was now in Paris, Alan abstracted one written just after her ninth birthday. Zenas Wheelock had sent her an archery set from Mackinac, and the letter, on a tiny sheet of lined notepaper, told how, at her birthday party, the children had gone out to the yard and shot arrows at the straw target.

"We had canvas over the parlor carpit," she wrote, "and we danced. Then we had Birthday Cake with candles and Strawberry ice cream. Alan gave me some lovely Decalcomania Pictures"—the formidable word was written with a meticulousness that plainly indicated careful copying—"and we put them on our face and mother was worried but they came off all right when she scrubed."

The details of the forgotten birthday party came sharply back to Alan. Blanche had worn a white dress with a wide pink sash, and he recalled exactly the picture he had helped transfer from the moistened paper to her face—a French poodle jumping through a hoop held by a clown. They had played forfeits, clap-in-and-clap-out, and post-office, and when ordered to "bow to the wittiest, kneel to the prettiest, and kiss the one you love the best," he had self-consciously ignored Blanche and instead kissed Marie Hayes, who, interpreting the kiss in her own way, had thereafter lavished upon him a devotion so conspicuous that, in order to make clear his point of view, he found it necessary, a few days later, to throw stones at her.

More like dreams than realities, these childhood recollections. It seemed that the boy moving through

them must have been some other boy, a boy very close to him, whose thoughts he had understood and whose actions he had watched with interest and concern. Yet, on the other hand, he seemed definitely to remember matters in which he had no part. His grandfather's stories had so long been familiar to him that now he felt as if he himself had participated in the actual events. Thus, though the Chicago Fire had occurred some years before his own birth, he had a strong illusion of having passed through that disaster with his grandfather; likewise, having so often heard it vividly described, he felt that he had visited Camp Douglas with its ten thousand Confederate prisoners; and he seemed to have seen the endless stream of covered wagons moving past the Bull's Head Tavern over the plank road which, in the 'fifties and 'sixties, was the highway through Chicago to the West. In his fancy, too, he recalled the arrival of the first railroad train in 1848, and ten years earlier, the excited gathering of citizens on the Lake Front to stare at the first steamer, lying off the bar. He remembered the laying of bored-log water-pipes; the wagons from which water was sold in bulk to householders, and earlier still, the days of the old public well. In the 'thirties he had hunted wolves with Zenas Wheelock where now stood the great industrial district of which the Pump Company was a part; had danced at the Shauganash Hotel, Chicago's first inn, and there had seen the young wife of an officer, dressed in the height of New York fashion, paired off in a quadrille with a carter, heavily booted, while her husband trod a measure with the half-breed

consort of a leading citizen. He had seen the paddles of *voyageurs* flash in the sun as their canoes swept down Lake Michigan, had heard their boat-songs ring across the water, had accompanied Zenas Wheelock and Dufour—mere youngsters, then, all three of them—when they landed, climbed a massive oak at the edge of the grove and from among leaves and gnarled branches gazed across the interminable reach of prairie, its grass and wild flowers billowing in the wind.

About one memory he was uncertain. If authentic, it was undoubtedly the earliest memory of his entire life. Dimly he seemed to recall being lifted at night from a closed carriage by a pair of strong arms which bore him toward a house. There was fog, and when the front door opened, he saw people silhouetted in a queer blurred light. Always at the recurrence of this dreamlike picture he had a feeling that his mother had been with him then. He didn't remember her face or the sound of her voice—only a kind of tender radiance which, throughout his later life, had remained in his mind the symbol for her.

Wondering if his aunt could identify the episode, he spoke to her about it.

"I should doubt that it was an actual memory," he said, "but for one part of it: I was very proud of my new hat, and was determined that everyone in the house should notice it."

Already Martha was smiling.

"There were two wide ribbons hanging over the back of the brim," she told him, "and you were chattering about it like a little magpie. You had

been away for the summer with your father and mother, and we were in the hall to meet you when you came home. Your mother was very ill, and died soon after."

He fell silent, perceiving, he believed, an allegory in the vision of his mother passing through the doorway on that foggy night so long ago. The allegory seemed to suggest an answer to a question on which, since his grandfather's death, he had often found himself reflecting. Might not the arrival of a soul in the Hereafter be like that remembered homecoming—the opening of a hospitable door, light beyond the mist and darkness, and friends waiting?

Gradually the family became adjusted to their loss. Little by little they found it less difficult to mention Zenas Wheelock, speaking of him as if he were away on a journey and would presently return to review what they had done. When, during the next summer, Alan learned that a warehouse was to be built on Napier Place, his first thought was of the satisfaction this significant intelligence would have given his grandfather. The Republican stand against Free Silver and the defeat of Bryan by McKinley in 1896 were witnessed by the Wheelocks as if through the old man's eyes; and again, in the fall of the same year, when Colonel Burchard appointed Alan assistant treasurer of the company, it seemed only natural that Martha should receive the news with the exclamation:

"Oh, I hope Father knows!"

CHAPTER XXXI

THROUGHOUT the neighbourhood, changes, more or less gradual, continued. New building was confined almost entirely to flats, the latest of which, taller than their predecessors, had elevators and were referred to as "apartments." These brought a further influx of strangers, and the custom under which old residents promptly called on newcomers having necessarily been abandoned, there were now many neighbours with whom the Wheelocks were unacquainted. However, the older and the newer social groups overlapped at the edges; Marie Hayes became engaged to a young man who had resided in Oakland but a year; and Mrs. Purnell, though still regarded by the older families as comparatively a new arrival, acquired social leadership among ladies of the flats, with whom she wielded the prestige of long-established residence.

"Mother's whist club is to meet here this afternoon," Leta explained to Alan when, calling for her one Saturday, he found the parlour crowded with card tables. "They've elected her president, and she's terribly impressed with herself—aren't you, Mother?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Mrs. Purnell, fluttering among the tables, frowned slightly through her smile. "You shouldn't say such things. People might believe it."

"Oh, I guess we needn't worry about Alan's misunderstanding us—not after all these years." Leta shot him an amused glance, and thrusting her hand through his arm, moved with him toward the front door.

"Where you children off to?" the mother asked; and upon hearing that they were bound for a tennis tournament at the new Kenwood Country Club, she made a further casual inquiry:

"You'll both be back here for supper?"

Leta looked up at him. "I suppose we will, won't we?"

"Why, yes," he answered, and she relayed his acceptance to her mother.

It was the usual routine, a pleasant routine, he reflected. He took almost as many meals at the Purnells' as at his own table, and felt almost as much at home in one house as the other.

As they started up Lake Avenue, Alan observed a junk wagon drawn up at the curb before the Burchards' house, and on the lawn behind the low stone paling saw the Colonel, accompanied by the junk man, circling about the fountain. The scene told its own story. Tom Burchard, who for several years had ridiculed the fountain as a relic of a bygone era of bad taste, had won his point at last. The phalanx of brick flat-buildings across the way forced even the Colonel to see that the iron children under their umbrella were an anachronism.

Similarly, to the Wheelocks' lawn had come a change. By contrast with the flats beyond, their green lattice summerhouse appeared ridiculous, and

when the wood began to rot, they did not repair, but demolished it. Jersey Belle, the only cow left in the neighbourhood, had now no other grazing place than the back yard; as her years increased, she gave less milk, but any talk of selling her elicited from Jason instant opposition. "Me and her don't like changes," he declared, shaking his kinky head, now touched with gray, and Martha perceived that, in the alley as on the avenue, the times were making themselves felt. The period of business depression on the one hand, and upon the other, the improved transportation provided by trolley cars and bicycles, had caused some families to give up their horses, and a further threat against the horse might be heard at times reverberating on the air.

Grant Hayes, who was of a mechanical bent, had transformed the carriage room of his stable into a machine shop where he was spending his spare time in the construction of a small steam engine designed to propel the family buggy. After months of labour, he announced that this horseless carriage was ready, and it was pushed over to Michigan Terrace for a trial trip, Alan, Leta, and other friends of the inventor in attendance. The kerosene burners under the boiler having been lighted, Grant opened the valves; whereupon the buggy, discharging jets of steam and whistling shrilly, lunged forward in a series of jerks accompanied by grinding sounds so violent as to alarm spectators and cause a lymphatic horse to run away and wreck a laundry wagon. The cloud of steam became more dense; the vehicle, stationary, shook and roared; and Grant began to dash around

it, trying frantically to shut off the overheated burners.

"Don't come too near!" he shouted, and the warning was heeded, for flames were beginning to lick at the sides of the body, and when a few minutes later the fire engine came clanging up, nothing remained of the experiment but a pile of metal, black and twisted in a bed of smoking ashes.

Walking homeward with Alan and Leta, Grant philosophically discussed the failure. "Apparently steam's not the right motive power," he said; and a few weeks later he assured them enthusiastically that within a year he would have a buggy running by electricity.

That spring, Colonel Burchard gave Alan further responsibility. In charge of the company's accounting, he had occupied what was hardly more than a head clerkship, but now he was sent to New York to arrange an issue of bonds, and when, after several conferences with Mr. Broderick, he telegraphed the Colonel of the favourable terms he had secured, he felt an elation such as no previous business experience had given him.

The banker's office, wainscoted in dark wood and heavily carpeted, suggested the library of a residence, and sometimes, as they sat there, this suggestion was enhanced by Mr. Broderick's conversation, for he had a way of dropping business and discussing economic and political conditions throughout the world: the Dreyfus case, the territorial ambitions of European powers in China, Cuba's suffering under Spanish misrule.

"General Weyler seems to be making things worse in Cuba," he said. "I don't know how long this country is going to put up with it, but it seems to me that, unless conditions change, we shall have trouble with Spain, and you young fellows had better be getting ready for it." His son, he said, was an officer of the Seventh New York Regiment, and he expressed approval when Alan mentioned that he was a sergeant in the First Illinois.

With the exception of one evening when Mr. and Mrs. Broderick took him to hear Calvé and the De Reszkes in "Faust," Alan was alone after nightfall, and though on every side diversion offered, he found little pleasure in solitary dining and theatre-going.

Arrangements for the bonding having been completed, he was left with a day to himself while the papers were being drawn. The afternoon he spent in sightseeing, and following a solitary dinner, set out for a walk, moving up Broadway amid a crowd of theatre-goers.

Around him eddied scraps of conversation: "We'd better"—"I think we"—"Shall we"—always *we*. Girls with their escorts alighting from the Broadway cars; girls with their escorts stepping out of hansoms and moving toward the glittering entrances of playhouses; girls clinging to the arms of young men, turning pretty heads and looking up into their faces with eyes that shone with the desire to please. At a fruit stand on the corner of Twenty-eighth Street, near Weber & Fields', he saw a youth select a red apple, polish it on his sleeve and hold it to the

lips of his girl companion, who laughed and opened wide her mouth.

As Alan moved along a painted woman with unnatural yellow hair passed close to him, touching his arm and slyly murmuring a greeting. Perhaps she could tell that he was lonely. Perhaps a woman of that kind, with her experience, was shrewd enough to read it in his face.

How many, many lonely people there must be in New York to-night! Thousands probably; among them girls—nice girls, too, who'd be glad of the chance to go to the theatre with any decent man. Yet there was no way for him to find such a girl, or for her to find him.

With Hammerstein's Olympia, at Forty-fifth Street, the brightly lighted part of Broadway ended, but Alan walked on, reaching presently the wide boulevarded highway above Fifty-ninth Street, with its private houses and its arching elms. After a time he came to the cross-street on which Blanche used to live and realized that without admitting it to himself he had made this his objective. Turning off, he passed the house, and when, looking up from the opposite side of the street, he saw a shadow flit across a glowing curtain, he was startled. Immediately he became annoyed with himself. Naturally the rooms hadn't stood vacant through the two and a half years since Blanche and Ray went abroad. When they moved out, others of course moved in. He paused for a moment, staring at the top-floor windows, golden patches on the night, and reflected on the curious, inescapable association that exists

in the mind between people and the scenes they have inhabited.

Unable to shake off the feeling that the windows still belonged to Blanche, he turned back. Somewhere in the darkness down West End Avenue he heard a tenor voice singing:

“Soon we shall be married;
Then happy we’ll be,
For I love sweet Rosie O’Grady,
And Rosie O’Grady loves me.”

Turning down Broadway he retraced his steps till he came again to the district of bright lights. People were in the theatres; the sidewalks were less crowded now, and as he strolled along he watched the passers-by. Near Forty-second Street, he noticed a girl coming toward him and was struck by something familiar in her graceful undulating gait. In the shadow of her hat brim her features were indistinct, but he was aware, as she drew near, that she was looking at him.

“Why, Alan!”

“Sophie!”

“I thought it was you,” she said, “only I couldn’t believe you were in New York. But as I was saying to another Chicago fellow I ran into just a few nights ago, everybody gets here sooner or later, don’t they? That’s one thing about New York.”

In his delight at meeting someone he knew, he forgot for the moment the unpleasant episodes with which she had been associated in his mind, and thought of her only as the girl he had known in the old days at business college.

"I'm on the stage now," she told him. "Me and Sarah Bernhardt!" Her familiar slow laugh was pleasing to his ears. "I'm playing the maid in the first act of a farce, so I get away early. You must come and see it. What are you doing—living in New York or something?"

When he replied that he was going home next day she seemed disappointed.

"I was hoping maybe you'd be around here awhile," she said, looking vaguely up at a street lamp. "It's sort of nice to see somebody from home. These New York fellows'll take a girl out and all, but they don't care anything about her—really." Her eyes came back to his. "After all, there's no friends like the old friends."

Studying her face, he saw that, though something of her freshness had departed, she was still extraordinarily pretty; moreover, in her trim tailored suit and dark fur neckpiece, she had now more style than in the old days.

"Were *you* feeling kind of lonesome?" she asked, almost hopefully.

"Horribly," he said. "Let's go some place where we can sit and talk—let's drive." And he helped her into a hansom.

In the shadowy cab she slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow, saying: "Seems like old times, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I haven't seen you since——" He checked himself, watching her as the light from a street lamp swung across her face.

"Not since the World's Fair," she put in quickly.

"Remember? I was with the man I was working for then, and you were with a girl that looked as if she'd like to claw my eyes out because I spoke to you."

The mention of Leta gave him a little feeling of contrition; yet meeting Sophie by chance, like this, after so long, what else could he have done?

"I was going around with that fellow trying to hold my job," she ran on, "but as soon as I found he was married, I quit going with him and he fired me." She laughed indolently. "Lordy, how I hated shorthand! I wonder what makes these married men want to run around with girls, anyhow? I never *did* get so's I could read my notes, and when I'd ask them to repeat it, they'd get cranky, and pretty soon I'd be out reading the want ads again. Even *you* got sort of tired hearing about my troubles, losing my jobs and all."

"It wasn't that," he said, "but I saw you weren't cut out for office work and——"

"I should say not!"

"I used to like to watch you struggling over your notes," he told her. "There was always a little wrinkle between your eyebrows, but it would disappear as soon as you got out on your bike."

"Do you still write shorthand?" she asked as the cab rounded the corner of Forty-second Street and started up Fifth Avenue.

"Not much any more."

"I thought not. We all sized you up as one of those solid fellows that would get on in the world. You have, haven't you?"

"I'm trying to. How did you happen to go on the stage?"

"Oh, my father died a couple of years back, and my mother went to live with my aunt in Milwaukee, and there was a little money, so I took my share of it and came to New York with another girl who knew a fellow that got us chorus jobs. Maybe you didn't know I could sing?" Again she laughed. "I didn't know it, either, but I found I could sing as well as most of them. The show went on the rocks, but after a while we got in another one, and my girl friend got married and went to live in New Rochelle—she has a baby now—and I got a little speaking part in this farce. Looks like it would run until hot weather comes. I certainly hope so."

Leaving Fifth Avenue, the cab moved into the relative darkness of Central Park.

"Notice how cool it is in here?" She nestled closer to him and he was strongly conscious of the softness of her shoulder. When he asked about a lighted building in the distance, she told him it was a restaurant, the Casino, but she rejected his suggestion that they stop there, saying she would rather drive.

"I just love this park," she said, and became quite the New Yorker, dilating upon the superiority of Central Park over the Chicago parks, and calling his attention, as they moved along, to Cleopatra's Needle, the dim gray bulk of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and McGown's Pass Tavern. "I'm always thinking I'll come up to the Museum and see the pictures," she remarked, "but I just don't know where the time goes."

"Working in the theatre," he said, "you ought to have lots of time."

She shrugged. "Oh, I know, but I can't help it—it's the way I am, that's all."

"Well, you shouldn't let yourself get——"

"Now, don't scold me." She looked up at him, pleading like a spoiled child. "I know I have lots of faults, but I hate to hear about them." Her face was close to his, and in the semi-darkness he could see the liquid blue of her eyes.

"I didn't mean——"

"Kiss me," she whispered.

It wasn't New-mown Hay, this perfume she was using now.

His arm was still about her, and her cheek was resting against his, as, having made the circuit of the Park, they emerged from the West Drive at Fifty-ninth Street. The tide of traffic he had breasted as he walked up Broadway earlier in the evening had turned, and the street was now filled with vehicles coming from the theatres.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Sophie as again they faced the lights. She sat upright, arranging her hat and fingering her golden hair. "I was always crazy about you, Alan, and I guess you knew it. Couldn't you possibly stay over a day or so?"

He shook his head, saying: "I wish I could."

"That means I won't see you any more?"

"I'm afraid it does."

"You'll be coming back to New York, though, won't you, dear?"

"I hope so."

They drove for a time in silence, turning into a side street lined with brownstone houses all alike. In a moment, they would be stopping at her door. He would be leaving her. He didn't want to leave her, but he knew that he had better. The cab horse slowed to a walk and a wheel scraped the curb. Sophie pressed his arm against her side.

"I'm not going to let you go!" she whispered. "I'm just not going to let you—that's all!"

His pulse was singing as he alighted with her, but by the time they reached the vestibule, doubt was beginning to assail him.

"Look here, Sophie," he said, "I oughtn't to be going in with you as late as this. It doesn't look well."

"It's a theatrical boarding house." Her tone seemed to imply that the fact eliminated any possible impropriety.

"Well, I don't want to give people a chance to talk about you."

By the dim light filtering out through the ground-glass panel of the door, he saw a faint quizzical smile upon her face.

"You're sweet, Alan," she said.

The term annoyed him. "I'm nothing of the kind!" he told her. "Just because a fellow has some sense of responsibility about a girl, it doesn't mean——"

She took a step toward him, and at short range looked him fairly in the eyes.

"If that's all that's troubling you," she said, "you haven't got a thing to worry about. I've

learned a lot about life since business college." For an instant her eyes hardened. Then swiftly, hotly, she kissed him.

After all, what did it matter? They were free agents, accountable to nobody, and they were going into this with their eyes open—without any sentimental illusions about love or marriage. He had always been too straight-laced anyway—too damned straight-laced!

"You can't go now!" she breathed.

"You bet I can't!" Grudgingly he released her, that she might unlock the door.

Within, a gas jet burning dimly revealed dark woodwork, brown wallpaper, and a worn green carpet. The stairs creaked where they curved to meet the second floor, and the short hall down which Sophie led him toward the rear of the house was very dark. As he stood waiting for her to light the gas in her room, a telephone bell sounded from the floor below, and a woman's voice, answering, carried up to him: "Miss Wainwright? No, she's not stopping here any more. The show's gone on the road."

Simultaneously, the light went on in Sophie's room.

"It isn't much of a place to bring you to," she said with an odd air of shyness, and having closed the door behind him, she swiftly scooped an armful of clothing from the white iron bed and carried it to the closet. "It looks nicer in the daytime, though. You can see the back yards, and the sun just pours in. Mrs. Bakewell, the landlady, is awfully nice—an old actress. She's been promising to do this

room over, and I wish she'd done it before you came." It was in Sophie's nature to be always a little apologetic.

Tossing her neckpiece to a chair, she slipped out of her jacket, puffing up the full sleeves of her shirtwaist as she crossed to the bureau, where, standing before the mirror, she removed her hat and with deft white fingers smoothed her pompadour.

"My goodness, I'm a fright!" Her frowning disapproval of the image in the glass struck him as droll, for Sophie, with arms uplifted and shapely hands fluttering about that golden coronal, made a picture infinitely lovely.

Turning she took him by the hand, drawing him toward the window, where stood two earthen flower-pots, each containing a geranium.

"They sort of brighten up the place, don't they? A man was selling them off a cart the other day when I came home—two for a quarter." She leaned over one of the scarlet blooms, breathing in its fragrance; and Alan, watching her, was fascinated as he used to be long ago by the indolent grace that imparted to every movement of her body a suggestion of physical strength combined with lassitude.

Standing erect again, she turned slowly toward him, a wavering brilliance in her eyes, her red lips slightly parted, and as his arms gathered her in, he felt a furious pride in their hard strength. With head thrown back and eyes closed, she gave herself to his embrace, whispering tremulously, "Sweetheart, sweetheart!"

One of the windows was lowered from the top, and

occasionally the shade fluttered against the sash with a sound like the beating of wings. Presently from below came again the insistent ringing of the telephone, and after a time a tap on the door and a woman's breathy voice:

"Oh, Sophie."

"Yes? What is it?" Gently she released herself.

"You're wanted on the telephone."

"Well, please say—say I've got a headache—say I've gone to bed."

"All right," came the voice from outside, and the steps retreated.

Sophie stood frowning for an instant, then moved swiftly to the door, and opening it, called into the hall:

"Oh, Mrs. Bakewell—did they give any name?"

"Mr. Keppler," answered the landlady from the stairs.

Sophie's frown deepened to a scowl.

"Well, then, tell him I'll be down—damn it!" She glanced back at Alan. "I've simply got to speak to him—that's all; he's a man that can do a lot for a girl on the stage. Don't get lonesome, I'll be right back." And with a quick smile she went out, closing the door.

Left to himself, Alan took to walking the dim flowered carpet. No doubt, as Sophie said, the room would look better by daylight, though in any light at all its shabbiness must be apparent. The wall-paper was streaked, and among the pictures he noticed two coloured lithographs, one a rural scene showing a cow standing knee-deep in a creek,

the other the familiar strip entitled "A Yard of Pansies."

The hemmed scarf, too small for the top of the bureau, revealed margins of oak marred by rings in memoriam of glasses that had stood there heaven only knew how long ago. Unpleasant, he thought, living in a place peopled by the ghosts of others who had come and gone.

The silver toilet set engraved with Sophie's monogram looked out of keeping on this bureau. A present, probably—she could hardly afford to buy such things for herself. Vaguely, he wondered who had given it to her.

At the back of the bureau, leaning against the bottom of the mirror, stood a row of photographs, theatrical pictures, most of them, he judged, some of girls in costumes, others of men. Only one of the pictures was framed, and observing that the silver frame matched the toilet set, Alan picked it up.

Why had Sophie framed the picture of a man who looked like that? The perfect curl of his moustache, the carnation in his buttonhole, the very set of his coat expressed complacency; yet there was a kind of strength about his face. He looked about forty. What could he mean to Sophie?

The other photographs bore inscriptions affectionate or familiar, but on this one merely a signature was scrawled, and Alan might not have been able to decipher the name had he not heard it spoken.

Keppler—the man she was talking to now! Abruptly, he put down the picture and turned away.

Sophie hadn't wanted to go to the telephone.

She hadn't wanted to talk to this man, but evidently felt she had to. Keppler could help her, she'd said. Probably it was only to flatter him that she had framed the photograph. The frame matched the silver toilet set, though. Had Keppler given it to her? Had he given her the set, too? And how would the framing of the picture flatter him unless he saw it—unless he was in the habit of coming here?

Again from the window came disturbingly the sound of the shade, flapping. He closed the sash and resumed his pacing of the floor. She had been downstairs quite a while. Evidently they had plenty to talk about, she and this Keppler.

As he walked, his eyes roved about the room. A flimsy screen, with panels of printed muslin gathered on rods, half concealed an old walnut washstand on which stood a pitcher and basin of heavy white crockery, an oilcloth splatterback tacked to the wall behind them. In a corner by one of the windows, beside a sagging couch, was a small table, and upon it, with the upturned cover of a soapdish as a receptacle, there lay, among fragments of ash, the short butt of a cigar.

He stared down at it.

From the moment he entered this room he had felt an aversion to it and to its sordid implications, and now he loathed the place. The ghosts he sensed about him were not the ghosts of people who had lived here before Sophie, but of the men who had come here since. As they had come, so he had come to-night, excusing himself on the ground that she was fair game now.

Fair game? What did "fair game" mean? That she was weak, that she had succumbed to her weakness, and that, where she was concerned, men therefore had no moral responsibility. The feeling Sophie aroused in him long ago had been protective—so at least he used to tell himself. But how quickly, in the presence of weakness, a man's protective instinct can turn predatory, preying upon the very quality that inspired it.

A spasm of disgust possessed him—disgust for himself, disgust for these other men, disgust for Sophie—pretty Sophie, shiftless, warm-hearted, indolent, pleasure-loving, slack, never breasting the adverse currents of life, but drifting always with the tides. Intensely he pitied her; yet he knew that to pity her was futile. Of all people, those wanting stamina were the most impossible to help. It was no more possible to help Sophie against her own supineness than to make a rope stand on end. The one thing he could do for her and for himself was to get out of here.

Snatching up his hat, he flung open the door and started down the stairs.

From the hall below came her voice at the telephone:

"Honey, I don't think it's very nice of you to say that." Even her reproaches sounded apologetic. "But, honey, I've told you over and over I *can't*—I've got an awful headache."

He had intended to wait and speak to her, but what could he say? He had come here because of what she was, and now for the same reason he was

going; but no amount of explanation could make Sophie understand. It would only wound her.

In a few swift steps he passed from the foot of the stairs to the front door. She was still talking on the telephone as he went out.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE affairs of the Pump Company were now in such favourable condition that for the first time in several years Colonel Burchard took his family abroad. During his absence, new responsibilities devolved upon Alan, and these afforded him a good excuse for declining a proposal of Frank Murphy's.

One sweltering evening in July, when Alan was sitting with Leta on the Purnells' stoop, Frank came hurrying across the street.

"I'm going up to the Klondike and hunt gold!" he cried, waving his hands as he approached; and joining them on the steps, he proceeded to exercise the persuasive powers of his race.

"Jakie Steinberg's crazy to go with me," he told them, "and I'll bet he could find the gold; but it's a tough trip, and I don't believe he's strong enough to stand the gaff. You're the one I want, Alan."

"Oh, I couldn't go."

"Yes, you could, too—you're just the one that ought to. You oughtn't to be sticking around the city like this. Come on and do like your grandfather did before you—get out into new country where the opportunities are!" And he began to paint alluring pictures of adventures culminating in vast wealth. "Why, I saw in the paper to-day where

a fellow came back and said they were just picking it up off the ground in baskets!"

"Then what did he come back for?" Alan asked, but Frank was too dazzled by the baskets of gold to perceive any weakness in the story.

"I guess he must have got all he wanted," he replied enthusiastically.

Frank's ardour was but momentarily dampened by Alan's refusal; he continued to regale them with eloquent descriptions of the Klondike and its riches, and on leaving, issued a final solemn warning:

"I'm afraid you're going to be mighty sorry you didn't get in on this, Alan," he declared. "I wouldn't be surprised if you'd be regretting it all the rest of your life."

Leta, however, did not share this view. "Imagine that crazy Irish boy's thinking you'd give up a good job," she said, "to go on a wild-goose chase away up in Alaska!"

When, a few days later, they went to the railroad station to bid Frank farewell, they found Jackie Steinberg with him on the platform.

"My advice to you," Alan heard him say to Frank at parting, "is, don't go and tire yourself all out digging, but take supplies up there and sell 'em. I was reading in the paper where lemons are fifty cents apiece."

Much was going on in the outside world that year, but for Alan the summer passed uneventfully. Colonel Burchard, returning in the fall, brought accounts of brilliant pageantry in London on the oc-

casion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and of renewed agitation in France over the Dreyfus case.

In Paris he had seen Blanche and Ray, and he confided to Alan that he was disturbed about them. Ray had invited the Burchards to dine, but arriving at his apartment, they found Blanche alone. Ray's work as a correspondent, she explained, made his hours uncertain, but doubtless he would get home before they left. He loved Paris, but for her part she had never got over being homesick. After dinner they had heard a commotion in the hall, and the concierge came in assisting Ray, who was helplessly drunk. Blanche had volunteered no information, but from the attitude of the concierge it was apparent that such occurrences were not unusual. "*Monsieur est encore sous,*" was the phrase he had used.

"She is a fine girl," the Colonel said to Alan, "and I'm afraid she made a bad bargain when she got that grandson of mine."

Stopping in New York on his way home from Europe, the Colonel had found Mr. Broderick and other financiers more than ever concerned about the situation in Cuba.

During the past summer, the Spanish Crown had redoubled its efforts to quell insurgency, resorting to methods that threatened extermination. Meanwhile, in the United States, popular demand for armed intervention steadily grew; the recall of General Weyler, brutal military governor, came too late to affect American sentiment; and when in mid-

February, 1898, the battleship *Maine* was blown up while lying at anchor in Havana Harbour, fury flamed throughout the land.

Illinois, acting immediately, was the first state in the Union to offer the President full support in such action as he might take for the maintenance of the nation's honour. Less than a month later, a board of inquiry found that the destruction of the *Maine* was due to an explosion outside the ship, whereupon Congress promptly appropriated for defence the staggering sum of fifty millions.

As the break with Spain became imminent, the National Guard made active preparations; April twenty-fourth, the day on which war was declared, found the First Illinois ready, and within a few hours after McKinley's call for volunteers, Alan was marching with his regiment down Michigan Avenue behind a band which played "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night," while excited crowds upon the sidewalks wept and cheered.

Swinging with his company past the gray stone pile of the Auditorium Hotel, Alan raised his eyes obliquely to a third-floor window previously designated, in which stood his father, his aunt, and Leta. She was holding a flag in both her hands, wildly waving it, and above the sidewalk shouts and the blaring of the band, he fancied he could hear her voice.

The events of the past few days, the innumerable errands, the farewells, the rush of rearrangement at home and at the office, the orderly chaos of the armoury, and his hasty marriage at St. Mark's, left in Alan's mind a series of blurred pictures like recol-

lections of dreams; and now, glancing at the window, he found it impossible to realize that the girl in white up there was actually his wife.

During the years Leta and he had, as they termed it, "gone together," no such thing as an engagement to marry had been spoken of; nevertheless, he had come to feel that they were engaged, and had understood that Leta felt so, too. Until a week ago, however, marriage had seemed entirely remote, a step to be contemplated at some vague time in the future when he had more money put away.

But the ragged rebels of an island jungle, with their *machetes* and their cries of "Cuba Libre," had changed that; for when it became apparent that war was a certainty, Leta had announced that she wished to marry him before he went. Mr. and Mrs. Purnell shared his opinion that it would be wiser to postpone the wedding until his return, but as usual her determination broke down parental opposition. His own father accepted placidly the news of the proposed marriage. "It seems rather romantic, doesn't it?" he suggested with a dim smile; but no smile appeared on Martha Wheelock's face when Alan told her. "I hope you'll be happy, dear. I hope everything will come out all right," she said; and there were tears in her eyes as she embraced him.

This morning a little group of friends and relatives had hurriedly assembled at St. Mark's. Mrs. Purnell, Alan remembered, had been crying—mothers usually cried at weddings—and his aunt had looked sad and tired; naturally it disturbed her to have him going to war. As he waited at the chancel, he heard

behind him Grant Hayes's whispered reassurance: "Don't worry. I've got the ring." But he wasn't worrying about the ring; he hadn't even thought of it. Leta was coming up the aisle. Never had he seen her look so beautiful. And never had he experienced such terror.

The spasm of fear was so intense that it made him weak, and for an instant he felt that his knees were giving way; but as quickly as it had come, the moment passed, and he comforted himself with the reflection that just as mothers wept, so, when face to face with marriage, brides and bridegrooms probably were overpowered, at the last, by a sense of the finality of what they were doing.

From the church he had gone directly to the armoury; to-morrow he would be in camp at Springfield, and presently in Cuba. Gazing down the vista of the flag-filled avenue, he tried to realize that he might never see this street again. Certainly there'd be some who wouldn't come back. But each of the others, Alan supposed, felt as he did—that no matter who else might be killed in battle, he himself would not be numbered among them.

How many of the world's heroic deeds would never have been accomplished, he reflected, but for man's instinctive and unreasoning faith in his own luck! Always death was an accident that happened to the other fellow. Luck! His grandfather, not a professional soldier, had passed safely through the Civil War and two Indian wars; yet his Uncle Lyman, only a few years out of West Point, lay dead on the field at the end of his first combat. But that was differ-

ent. Fighting these Spaniards wouldn't be half as dangerous as fighting Indians.

At the Illinois Central Station troop trains were waiting; eagerly the men scrambled aboard, and those in Alan's car were singing "All Coons Look Alike to Me" as the train began to move. But for their uniforms and the equipment cluttering up the aisles, they might have been going to a picnic.

As the train passed Oakland, Alan looked out at the familiar scenes—the old wall on which, as a boy, he had so often sat and watched the trains go by; Colonel Burchard's stable, with its back to the railroad; and his lawn with the roque court and the black cherry trees, through the branches of which he caught glimpses of Shire's green stone houses, a block distant. Leta's house—third from the corner. The flats, and the old four-square house in which he had been born. . . . A man in the seat ahead was smoking a cigar, and the breeze from the open window swept the smoke into Alan's face. It stung his eyes and made him blink.

Detraining a little after dawn next day at the State Fair Grounds at Springfield, they found several companies from other regiments already encamped; throughout the day troops kept pouring in, and by night eight or nine thousand men were quartered in tents and in the various Fair buildings.

During the three cold rainy weeks that followed, the camp was continually crowded with visitors, and twice while Alan was there, Leta and his Aunt Martha came to see him. In the middle of May, the regiment, mustered into the Federal service, left the

chill of Illinois, and after pausing for a fortnight at Chickamauga in the warmth of the early Georgian summer, entrained for Tampa, where they sweltered through the month of June, boarded a transport, and landing at Siboney nine days later, struggled in their woollen uniforms through the tropical jungle to the trenches before Santiago.

Already Cervera's squadron had made its futile dash from the harbour to meet destruction in a running fight with Sampson's ships; and when, a week after the arrival of the First Illinois, the besieged city surrendered, and the American army went into camp, Alan reflected with satisfaction that upon his return there would be another sword to hang over the mantel in the library, with the swords of his uncle and his grandfather. For now he was a first lieutenant.

Homeward bound after six weeks upon the island, he leaned against the transport's rail and watched the shore of liberated Cuba draw astern. Nor was there visible a sign to indicate that any change had taken place behind that masking line of foliage.

War hadn't been in the least what he expected it to be. He had witnessed no dashing cavalry charges, no assaults with fixed bayonets; he had scarcely seen a Spanish soldier until after the surrender, and the comparatively few losses in his regiment had been caused not by bullets but by Spain's deadly allies, climate and disease. War, he concluded, was a matter of heat, humidity, fatigue; of canned goods, smells, and flies; of mosquitoes gathered thick upon blue woollen shirts.

Slowly the transport voyaged north to Montauk Point; slowly the sick and weary men debarked; slowly dragged away the hours at Camp Wikoff, hot, congested, ill-equipped; slowly the troop train crept across the States in the direction of Chicago.

The heat of early September hung like a copper lid above the city as the regiment marched to the armoury, where several hours passed before Alan was able to leave. It was twilight when he alighted from a suburban train at Oakland, and as he hastened toward the avenue a block away, the turreted green mass of the Shire house at the corner was a welcome sight because it was near home.

At the corner his objective changed. He had been heading for his grandfather's house; but now with a start he realized that he was not going there, but to Leta.

She was at the window. The parted curtains dropped as he ran up the steps and he knew that she was rushing to the door. Hardly speaking, they clung to each other in the hall, and only drew apart on hearing Mrs. Purnell's voice calling a greeting as she hurried down the stairs.

"Remember, I haven't been home yet," he presently reminded them, leading Leta toward the door, "and Aunt Martha will be waiting."

"Indeed you *haven't* been home yet!" Leta laughed, and looked at her mother knowingly. "You've been away so long you don't know where your home is any more."

"I've been thinking about that," he said as they

went out. "We'll have to be getting a place of our own."

"No, we won't," she answered with a happy laugh. "We've got one now!"

"We have? Where?"

"Over there on the top floor." She indicated the apartment building on the next corner. "It's all furnished, and we're going to move right in."

When Alan had seen his father and his aunt, Leta took him over and proudly exhibited the home that she had made.

"Father and Mother gave us the piano," she explained; "and your aunt gave us the silver and the chinaware and the linen."

"This furniture's bully!" He dropped into a leather-seated chair in the little parlour and drew her to his lap. "I suppose Father must have——"

"Books," said Leta, quickly comprehending, and she pointed to the shelves. "I'm perfectly delighted that you like the furniture, dear. I was sure you would. I bought it myself, and it's the very latest thing—mission, you know."

"Mighty comfortable," he approved, "and stout, too."

"That's what I felt. I could have found something cheaper, but I thought I'd get things now that would do us always."

"That's sensible."

"Of course, it isn't paid for," she went on, "but Mr. Bailey said practically any arrangement that suited you would be all right." She jumped up and took him by the hand, complaining archly:

"But you haven't said a word about the pictures. Really, I'm quite hurt. You can't imagine the time I put in copying those two Gibson drawings!"

Volubly, he admired her handiwork, and having done so, must needs accompany her upon a second tour of the rooms, praising everything from the rugs and portières to the tinware in the kitchen.

"And see," she cried, "I'm going to cook with *gas*! Isn't it perfectly wonderful the things they think of nowadays?"

Never before had she seemed to him so lovely.

"Leta," he said, taking her in his arms, "you're just the sweetest thing that ever lived, and I'm the luckiest dog on earth!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

LIFE in the new apartment settled down to a happy routine. Parties were given for the bridal couple, and Leta, who had taken cooking lessons during Alan's absence, gave a series of small dinners, at the first of which the guests were her parents and his father and aunt. Intensely proud of his young wife's domestic skill, Alan was pleased when Harris Wheelock—habitually as vague about his meals as about everything else—praised the dishes she had prepared; but to Mrs. Purnell no laudation of Leta ever seemed adequate, and with the arrival of each course she exclaimed anew, dilating on her daughter's divers talents until Leta, embarrassed, reproved her. Once launched upon this theme, however, Mrs. Purnell was not easily checked. "That just goes to show how modest she is!" she announced to the others. "I've always said that modesty was the crowning jewel in a woman's character."

"Oh, *Mother!*" Leta, with a platter of chicken in her hands, gave a pained grimace across the table.

"Well, you *are* modest," the other persisted, "and I'm sure there's not a soul here but what will bear me out in saying so." As if demanding confirmation, she looked around the table, her glance finally settling upon the face of Martha Wheelock,

who, with a quick murmur of assent, became suddenly voluble, telling how Grant Hayes, experimenting with his new horseless carriage, had done something—Martha didn't know just what—which put out all the electric lights in the neighbourhood. She made a considerable story of the episode, describing the subsequent call of a man from the light company who had been sent up to threaten a discontinuance of service, but who, under the spell of Grant's enthusiasm, stayed until midnight, helping the young inventor with his electric motor.

"I guess that must have been the night the lights went out in our house," commented Mr. Purnell; and there followed some discussion of the practicability of self-propelled vehicles, Mrs. Purnell taking the stand that they would never be permitted on the streets because they would frighten horses.

More than once that evening Alan was grateful to his aunt for covering with a deft conversational touch the innocent vulgarities of his mother-in-law and his father-in-law—vulgarities of which he had always been aware, but which in the presence of his own people he felt more keenly, notwithstanding—or perhaps in some measure because of—his aunt's kindly efforts to appear oblivious of them.

After dinner, when the men were smoking in the parlour, Mr. Purnell, strolling up and down the rug, advanced the theory that, contrary to the general belief, walking after meals aided digestion. "It takes away that stuffy feeling," he explained, and catching his reflection in the mirror above the carved cherry mantelpiece, drew out his pocket comb

and groomed his opulent moustache, continuing, the while, his dissertation upon diet and digestion. This time it was Leta who shifted the conversation, sparing the company what threatened to become an evening of alimentary reminiscence; but the comb remained in operation until Mr. Purnell, after critical examination of his handiwork, returned it to his pocket.

Standing in the doorway as the guests departed, Alan and Leta heard Mr. Purnell complaining good-naturedly about the stairs. "Quite a climb up here, isn't it, Miss Wheelock?" he said, adding benevolently: "But they don't mind. When you're young, it doesn't matter—your wind's all right and you haven't developed any trouble with your feet yet."

If Martha Wheelock replied, her reply was inaudible to Alan and Leta. It was Mrs. Purnell's voice that came drifting up to them. "That's one thing I'll say for Leta—I've always been particular about her shoes. She's got as nice feet as you'll ever see on anybody."

Leta was frowning as they closed the door. "Mother and Father can certainly make a mess of things when they set out to do it, can't they?" she said. "And of course, to-night, it was just our luck that they had to be extra bad."

"Nonsense, dear." He put his arm around her as they moved toward the kitchen. "They're no different from anybody else."

"Yes, they are," she insisted. "And you know it—you know they aren't like your Aunt Martha and your father."

Again, however, he equivocated, telling her she had worked too hard over the dinner and was tired.

Drying the dishes as Leta washed them, he reproached himself for having let the ineptitudes of the Purnells disturb him. It was petty in him to have noticed trifling infringements of good taste in people of such sterling character. Certainly, in all the things that counted, the Purnells were fine—otherwise how could they have such a daughter? It was true that Mrs. Purnell sometimes talked too much about Leta, but why shouldn't she be proud? She had a right to be! It would be a good thing if there were more people in the world like the Purnells, people who, whether or not they dotted all their "i's" and crossed their "t's" brought up their children as Leta had been brought up. He'd like to see any other girl of her age who was as sweet and fine as she, or as pretty, or who could sing and dance and draw as she could, and who, in addition, could make a home like this one, and cook and serve as good a dinner as she had cooked and served to-night. His aunt and his father had been better educated than Mr. and Mrs. Purnell; that was all. The differences between them were purely superficial, and he knew that his aunt and his father would be the first to say so, for they weren't snobs.

That night, with his head upon his pillow, he found himself defending the Purnells against imaginary detractors. Nobody had better try to make fun of them in his presence! Nobody ever *had* tried, either, except—he thought of Ray. Ray had made fun of them, but that was long ago. Even then he

had been annoyed by Ray's attitude, and now the recollection of it angered him. As drowsy thoughts merged with dreams, he was having it out with Ray, giving him a piece of his mind. In the old days Ray's nimbleness of speech had been too much for him, but in this visioned dialogue each stinging rebuke administered by Alan struck home, leaving the other silent and abashed.

November saw the regiment mustered out of the Federal service; a month later a treaty of peace with Spain was signed, and on January first, 1899, Spanish rule in Cuba came formally to an end. Meanwhile, however, there was trouble in the Philippines, where the "little brown brother" Aguinaldo and his followers were engaged in activities anything but fraternal; and for this reason Admiral Dewey, captor of Manila, remained in the distant islands with his squadron for some seventeen months after his victory, thereby tantalizing an entire nation.

On the twenty-sixth of September, the day on which New York was wildly celebrating Dewey's long-delayed arrival, a son was born to the young Wheelocks. He was christened Zenas, but because of certain pugilistic gestures in which Alan saw a likeness to the sparring attitudes of James J. Corbett, his parents early fell into the way of calling him "Gentleman Jim," a nickname which, in abbreviated form, persisted.

Jim Wheelock, unlike his father, was born into a world not unacquainted with scandal. Pritchett's attentions to Florence Holden had through the

past year become increasingly conspicuous, and after a series of quarrels with her husband, she had eloped to Europe with the bicycle manufacturer.

Luke's suit for divorce aroused bitterness between him and the Shires, who maintained that he had brought the trouble on his own head by his unfeeling treatment of their daughter. His answer to this charge took the form of a pair of tall spite fences, one darkening the windows of the end house in the Shire block, while the other cut off light from the first- and second-story apartments in the "Florence." now owned entirely by Shire.

Thenceforward, the Holden house became more than ever an abode of gloom. Luke no longer nodded to his neighbours when he met them on the street, and kitchen gossip brought in by Delia related that his own servants hated him. Even Willie, the gangling son left behind by Florence, was under the ban of his father's displeasure; never popular among the other boys, Willie, after his mother's elopement, withdrew still more into himself, and forbidden to go to his grandparents', became a figure solitary and pathetic.

None of these conditions, however, troubled young Jim Wheelock, whose appetite was his chief concern. The Boer War, which presently absorbed the attention of the world, Jim ignored; the victory of McKinley and Roosevelt over Bryan and Stevenson did not interest him; and when, at the age of two, he was carried in to look at baby Katherine, his new sister, he yawned and turned away. To the activities of Santos-Dumont, Carrie Nation, and Marconi

he was wholly indifferent; the discovery by the Wright brothers of a new principle in aëronautics seemed to him, at five, infinitely less important than his own discovery of Delia's cooky jar; and when, one evening, his father came home with the announcement of his promotion to a vice-presidency of the company, Jim, glancing up from his apple sauce and cream, clearly wondered why his mother clapped her hands and danced around the dining table.

The promotion brought about domestic changes. To the household of the young Wheelocks came rosy-cheeked Annie O'Shea, niece of the faithful Delia, to cook, wait on table, and—when Leta went out—take care of the two children.

Leta, meanwhile, was conducting a campaign against Oakland as a place of residence. "There's no doubt about it," she announced to Alan; "the North Side is the place to live, and I'll never be satisfied until we move there."

No subject could now be mentioned, it seemed to Alan, that did not lead by a conversational path to the North Side. According to Leta, the nicest people in Chicago either lived on the North Side or were about to move there; because of the absence of the railroad the North Side was cleaner and the air would be better for the children; moreover, Alan's office was on the North Side, and Leta found in this another argument. "I don't see how you stand that tedious journey back and forth," she said. "There are lovely apartments within walking distance of your work."

In Leta's persistence, there was something which curiously associated itself in Alan's mind with her little white teeth, so even, so pretty and so hard; her very smile expressed determination; she would draw back her lips, showing her teeth firmly set, as if she had sunk them in the object of her desire and was not to be shaken off. Smiling her resolute smile, she would describe to Alan apartments she had looked at; smiling, she took him to inspect them; and smiling, she saw their furniture carried to a moving van.

The new apartment was larger, and there were two servants now, allowing Leta more freedom and more ease in entertaining. Occasionally, she would accompany Alan on a trip to New York, sending the children to Oakland, or getting Martha Wheelock or Mrs. Purnell to come and stay with them.

Leta enjoyed New York with a peculiar intensity; yet Alan, knowing this, was astonished and disturbed by her attitude when, on his return from a brief trip East, he spoke of a proposal he had received there.

"Mr. Broderick's been after me again," he said, "but I told him I didn't think we'd ever want to leave Chicago."

"You did? What made you tell him that?"

"Well, it's so, isn't it?" In the act of unpacking his travelling bag, he looked quickly up at her.

"I should say not!" From her chair by the window, she smiled at him, showing her white teeth.

"Why," he protested, "what did you tell me when we took this apartment?"

"But New York's a different matter. I'd love to live there—anybody would."

"Blanche doesn't." He was emptying the contents of the collar bag into the top drawer of the chiffonier. "She told me she's delighted to be back in this country, but she'd like to live out here. From what she said, I gathered that Ray's doing pretty well on the newspaper; and her little girl, Dorothy, is lovely, perfectly lovely. She's nearly six now—speaks French better than she does English—and she looks just the way Blanche did when we were kids, sort of demure, with great big hazel eyes, and——"

"Did Mr. Broderick make a definite proposition?"

With his back turned, Alan was stacking shirts in the deep drawer of the chiffonier, and when after a long moment he replied, there was a kind of dullness in his tone.

"It wasn't entirely definite," he said. "I didn't want it to be."

"Just what did he say?"

"Oh, he told me he had asked Colonel Burchard's consent before broaching the subject."

"And what did the Colonel say?"

"He told Mr. Broderick he wouldn't want to stand in my way."

"Fine! Did you get any idea what salary Mr. Broderick would pay?"

"He spoke of a junior partnership."

"A partnership! Why, that would mean ten or twelve thousand, wouldn't it?"

"I guess so."

"Alan Wheelock, do you mean to tell me you had an offer like that and didn't grab it?"

"We're getting along all right," he retorted almost

sullenly. "I'm doing well enough where I am—what more do we want?"

"A lot more! Why, just the other day one of Father's friends told him you were known as one of the ablest young business men in this city."

"What else could a person say—to my father-in-law?"

"Just the same," she persisted, "I've always said Colonel Burchard wasn't paying you anything like what he ought, and I——"

"Nonsense, he's done everything in the world for me."

"If you weren't worth more than you're getting," she countered, "Mr. Broderick wouldn't be offering you more."

"It's just that Broderick & Co. is a rich firm," he said, "and that salaries are higher in New York."

"That's because the ablest men go there."

"Not altogether. It costs more to live in New York."

"Yes, because it's worth more."

"Not to me—when all our friends are in Chicago." He sighed, closing the empty bag and throwing it into the closet.

"Oh," she answered quickly, "we'd make new ones fast enough! The Brodericks know everybody, and the first thing I'd set out to do would be to get on Mrs. Broderick's right side."

"If you set out to do it," he said wearily, "you'd do it, all right."

A file of papers he had taken from his bag was lying on the bed, and now, as he began to sort them, Leta

watched him with the shadow of an ironical smile upon her face.

"When you said all our friends are in Chicago," she declared in a voice smooth as velvet, "you forgot about one—even if you don't forget her when you go to New York." And in a mocking tone she added: "Blanche is there. That ought to be an inducement."

Slowly straightening up, Alan looked at her with cold eyes across the bed.

"It is," he answered deliberately. "Since you choose to make a point of it, it very definitely is."

CHAPTER XXXIV

DWARFED by surrounding skyscrapers, the building had nevertheless, by reason of its age and its massiveness, a look of consequence. The gray stone wall rising from the sidewalk's edge was pierced with deep-silled windows of plate glass polished always to a mirrorlike brilliancy, and alive, throughout the busy hours of the Wall Street day, with reflections of the passing crowds.

A critical eye inspecting the façade might have discovered but a single evidence of wear. The wide stone entrance step, between the granite columns of the portico, dipped gently in the middle, hollowed by the tread of countless feet. John Broderick, president of the firm, recalled that there had been a slight depression in the step when, fresh from an apprenticeship in European banking houses, he had come back to New York and gone to work here. His father, founder of C. V. A. Broderick & Co., had done his part in making this depression, and almost every noted man in American finance since the middle of the last century had contributed the friction of his tread. Therefore, the step with its little sag was a source of pride to John Broderick and his partners, a cherished symbol of the firm's substantial age.

At the double doors, however, the appearance of age abruptly vanished, the interior of the building having been elaborately modernized. Inside was a marble floor surrounded by marble sidewalks, breast-high like those at the shallow end of a natatorium. To the left, this barrier was surmounted by a framework of ornamental bronze, outlining a series of plate-glass windows resembling those of tanks in an aquarium, behind which clerks and tellers swam solemnly about their business; but to the right the marble fence served merely as a kind of dyke, inclosing an area carpeted in seaweed-green out of which rose bulky roll-top desks like boulders of mahogany, perches for the more important monsters of this little sea, among whom secretarial young women, undulating to and fro, suggested fish of graceful and decorative species.

Shortly before one o'clock on this mild day in the early spring of 1921, a large man wearing a black felt hat came in from the street and looked uncertainly about the marble foyer. The messenger boy preceding him and the man behind, who caught the swinging door as he let it go, were evidently accustomed to the place and, having entered, hurried on their way; but the man in the black felt hat, unmistakably a stranger, hesitated until a gray-uniformed policeman on duty in the foyer approached.

"I want to see Mr. Wheelock," said the visitor.

"Will you let me have your card, sir?"

"I haven't any card. Tell him Frank Murphy."

"Have you got an appointment?"

"No, just tell him I'm here."

The policeman, indicating a bench, moved to the counter and in a low voice spoke to someone there who, glancing at the visitor, withdrew and spoke to someone else, who turned and entered one of the offices at the back of the green-carpeted area, whence presently came an efficient-looking young man with further inquiries.

"I'm Mr. Wheelock's secretary. Is there anything I can do?"

"Does he know I'm here?"

"He's just going out to keep an appointment, and——"

"All I'm trying to do," answered the other, rising, "is to get somebody to tell him I'm here. I'm an old friend of his."

"I see." The shrewd eyes behind the secretary's glasses had been estimating the caller. "I'm sure he'll see you if possible, Mr. Murphy. Will you wait here just a moment?"

Having vanished through the doorway from which he had come, the young man emerged a moment later from another door in which, as he led Frank toward it, Alan Wheelock appeared.

"By George, it's good to see you!" he exclaimed, shaking Frank's hand. "Come in and tell me about yourself. I was out home a couple of months ago, and they told me you'd gone to Honduras to raise bananas."

"I've had to give that up for the time being," said Frank, dropping into the chair that Alan pushed out for him. "There's a fortune in it, though. It isn't just raising bananas—anybody can do that. I've

got a formula for making banana flour that's going to practically do away with wheat flour. In the meantime, Grant Hayes has given me the general agency for his cars in Mexico and Cuba. I'm on my way to Chicago now, to see about it."

"That's fine," said Alan. "Grant makes about the best medium-priced car there is. They used them for light ambulances in the war, you know."

"You bet I know! Makes me kind of ashamed yet, when I remember how we used to josh him about his horseless carriages."

"I heard about your getting decorated in France," Alan remarked, "and I looked for you once at a little town named Fleury, but they'd just transferred your outfit to another sector." He broke off. "Look here, can you lunch with me?"

"I don't want to take up your time," Frank demurred, but Alan had already half risen. "Jameson!" he called; and, when the grave young secretary appeared in the doorway, directed him to postpone to another day the luncheon engagement he had been about to keep.

At table in the club their talk turned naturally to Oakland, and Alan, whose business took him to Chicago now and then, found himself acting as impromptu historian of the district. When the bicycle boom burst, Grant Hayes had bought the Pritchett plant at a bargain and started in to manufacture automobiles; Pritchett, with the remnant of his fortune, had gone with Florence to live on the Riviera; Willie Shire Holden, after years of quarrelling with his father, eloped with a pretty girl from a milliner's

shop; and, contrary to Oakland's pessimistic prophecies, she had made a man of Willie, who was now proprietor of the best garage in the neighbourhood.

"My Aunt Martha bought her car of him," Alan remarked. "In fact, about the only person around there who doesn't trade with Willie is his father. Luke Holden brought all his troubles on himself, but you can't help being sorry for him. He's old and broken, hasn't a friend left, and he spends all his time thinking up new ways to be mean."

"He had a row with the Shires, didn't he, after his wife ran away?"

"Yes, he's quarrelled with everybody—didn't even go to Shire's funeral."

"I hadn't heard of his death."

"Died over a year ago. He was inspecting some cheap houses he'd built up near Forty-second Street, and a flimsy stair rail gave way with him. Mrs. Shire still lives in the green stone house. Mr. and Mrs. Steinberg have stayed in Oakland, too, but the children have married and moved away. Jakie has a big retail-clothing business downtown."

Frank smiled. "I've always been sort of sorry I didn't take him to Alaska with me that time," he said; and upon inquiring about Mr. and Mrs. Purnell, was told they had moved back to their old home in Des Moines.

"I was sorry to hear about your father," Frank went on. "He passed away mighty sudden, didn't he?"

Alan nodded. "He was in the library repairing an old book. They found him there with his head on the desk, and at first they thought he was asleep."

"I read in the paper about the sale of his books. Nobody ever dreamed there was a library as valuable as that in Oakland."

"We didn't ourselves," Alan told him. "We thought his book collecting was just a hobby—a rather extravagant hobby, too. But he knew what he was doing. There were volumes he bought for a few dollars that sold up into the hundreds and even the thousands. I wish my grandfather could know about it—and about Napier Place."

"Cleaned up?"

"Yes, mostly skyscrapers now. Number Twelve's the Wheelock Building—twenty stories." He glanced out of the window. "They were planning eighteen, but I remembered when I was a kid hearing Grandfather talking with Shire about how high buildings could go. Shire said eight or ten stories was the limit, but Grandfather said twenty; so"—with a little smile he turned again to Frank—"we added a couple of stories: made the building a kind of monument to him."

Alan found it curiously delightful to be with someone who had known the Oakland he had known, someone whose interest in Oakland news was no less keen than his. In spite of his occasional visits, he usually thought of the old neighbourhood as a place unreal and infinitely remote, but this talk with Frank made boyhood memories live again.

"How's Leta?"

With an effort Alan brought his thoughts back to the present. "Why, she's all right," he said. "The winter season in New York is so busy that she gets

tired about this time of year, and she's gone to White Sulphur for a rest."

"I was counting on seeing her. Children well?"

"Yes, you and my boy Jim are fellow veterans—he drove an ambulance over there."

"Doesn't seem possible he's old enough for that."

"Getting on toward twenty-two; and Kit, my daughter, came out last winter. In some respects, she seems older than Jim, but that's the way with these modern girls. Everything's so different."

"Do you think it's the war?"

"The war certainly disorganized my boy," Alan answered. "I can't get him to buckle down to anything. He seems to be going on his nerves all the time." He leaned back, his brow contracted in a troubled frown. "You know, Frank, as I began to make a little money, I was always planning what we could do for the children, but I've found out that you can't do more than just so much. A parent is infernally helpless. The thing I wanted most to give Jim and Kit was the kind of childhood you and I had. And that's the one thing I *haven't* been able to give them."

"Oh, I guess each generation worries that way about the next," Frank commented consolingly.

"No, this problem of young people to-day is something different. They're out of hand. I don't pretend to know how deep it runs or how far it will go, but it's the kind of thing that, if it goes on, may ultimately mean the decadence of the whole race. 'Freedom'—'individualism'—'self-expression'—that's their talk; and it boils down merely to the

fact that they resent all discipline. In that respect Ray Norcross was one generation ahead of his time. I remember hearing him say to his grandfather that he intended to be his own master, and I can still see the look on Colonel Burchard's face when he said: "You can't be—nobody ever is."

"Does Ray understand that yet?"

"I'm afraid not."

"He's done pretty well, hasn't he?"

"Yes, pretty well; but he's always on the wrong side of everything. Last time I saw him, he was all in favour of the Russian revolution—said it's just what we need over here." Alan smiled. "One night, when he and Blanche were dining at our house, he told me that when the 'red dawn' came, I and my kind would be the first to face the firing squad."

"Good of him to let you know in plenty of time. Did his radicalism make him turn down the money Colonel Burchard left him?"

"No, and it didn't prevent him from trying to break the will, either. The money was left in trust, and that made Ray furious. When he found he couldn't get it, he mortgaged the income to a shyster money-lender at an absurd rate, and promptly ran through what he'd raised. He and some other free spirits started a radical paper—anti-everything—and when the war came along, the government suppressed them. For a while, I thought Ray would get in jail and be a martyr, but he couldn't nag them into arresting him. He's been out in California for over a year—improving the movies."

"Still drinking?"

"I haven't heard anything to the contrary."

"Blanche has certainly had a lot to put up with," said Frank reflectively.

"Blanche is wonderful." Alan spoke with feeling. "She has stood everything a woman could stand, and I've never heard her utter a word of complaint." He drew cigars from his pocket and tossed one across the table. "If there's anything braver than a fine woman when she sets out to be a stoic, I don't know what it is."

"Yes, and Blanche deserved the best. Back in the old days, I had a sort of notion you were going to marry her."

Evidently Alan's cigar did not draw well, for he was turning it over in his fingers, inspecting the wrapper; and when presently the waiter brought the check, the two rose and left the club.

"I'll tell you somebody you'd see if you were going to stay a little longer," said Alan as they threaded their way through the bustling sidewalk crowds. "Old Delia's coming to pay us a visit, and Leta and I are going to have a grand time showing her the sights."

The mention of Delia recalled half-humorous memories to them both. Frank reminded Alan of the occasion when, hard pressed by the Micks, the Oakland boys retreated to the Wheelocks' back yard, where in the nick of time they were reinforced by Delia brandishing a mop. "And do you remember how she'd scold when we wanted to make lemonade in her kitchen," he went on, "and the way we used to raid that old stone cookie jar on the pantry shelf?"

"Yes, I have to praise her cookies all over again every time I go home."

"Home!" Frank's tone became suddenly grave. "I'm glad you still call it that. My folks are gone, and I haven't seen Oakland in twenty years, but it's the first place I'll want to go when I get back."

They had reached the entrance of the banking house, and now by the worn step they paused.

"I'm not sure I'd do that if I were you," said Alan slowly.

"You wouldn't?"

"No, things have changed. I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

CHAPTER XXXV

SIX moves in fourteen years," he said in a weary voice, and catalogued them for her on his fingers: "The little apartment in West Eightieth Street, the family hotel, the house on West End Avenue, the apartment on Central Park West——"

"I knew you'd take it this way," she broke in, but he was not to be stopped.

"—the one in East Seventy-third, and this one—a whole floor in exactly the part of Park Avenue you said you liked best."

"I knew you'd take it this way," she repeated sullenly, "and I'd never have proposed it except for the children."

"The children? They're satisfied—they like it here."

"What do they know about it? The point is, we can't entertain for them the way we ought to."

"In twenty rooms?"

"Eighteen," she corrected. "But I don't care how big an apartment is, it's only an apartment, and you can't get any effect of space."

"Can't you?" There was irony in the gaze with which Alan inspected his surroundings; the stately living room, modelled after a chamber in a Florentine

palazzo, and a vista through two sets of double doors, beyond which, in the spacious dining room, the butler was at the moment putting silver in a side-board drawer.

"Oh, you know what I mean." Leta was frowning.

"I'm blessed if I do!"

"There's nothing like a big house with a fine staircase. This one I've been looking at has a lovely little elevator, too."

"But, my dear girl, be reasonable! Just think what we've spent fitting up this place, and the lease has two and a half years to run."

"We can afford it, can't we?" she asked defiantly.

"That's no excuse for deliberate waste. We've got more room here than we can use, and this house you're talking about is even bigger than the Brodericks'."

"What of it? Aren't we as good as the Brodericks?"

"I'm sure I don't know," he answered, "but we'll never prove it by being showy. It would be absurd for us to have a house larger than theirs, when he's the head of the firm, and I'm only——"

"Only his principal partner," she put in quickly. "Doesn't he leave everything to you? Isn't he doing it more and more? What business is it of his—or Mrs. Broderick's either—what kind of house we have? You wouldn't feel that way if you'd heard what Ned Harden said the other night at dinner. He said everybody in the street thought the firm name ought to be changed to Broderick, Wheelock

& Co., and he said Broderick would practically have to agree to it if you asked him."

"Well, I won't ask him."

"Of course you won't! You've never demanded your rights. You didn't with Colonel Burchard, and you won't now."

"Leta," he said gravely, "it isn't necessary to demand one's rights with men like them, and I——"

"Yes, it is," she interrupted. "It's always necessary—everywhere."

"I haven't found it so," he answered quietly, "except——" He checked himself.

"I know what you mean!" she said indignantly. "The idea of your saying such a thing when you know perfectly well you always have your own way. Did I complain about your buying the farm in New Hampshire? It's no earthly use to us, and I knew it never would be."

"I didn't want to let the place get into the hands of strangers," he answered mildly. "And aside from that, I can't imagine a lovelier spot for us to spend our summers."

"Well, I can."

"You haven't seen it since it's been fixed up," he reminded her. "It's been beautifully restored—those gimcrack porches all knocked off, and a big flagged terrace where they used to be. The gardens will be fine this spring, and I've had them plant willows where you said the river bank looked bare. If you'd just——"

"But there's nobody up there," she protested.

"I thought you might like that for a while this

summer. It would be good for you and if you wanted people, you could invite them up. There's lots of room."

"But I've told you over and over again," she droned in a tired, irritated voice, "none of our friends *want* to go to that sort of place. It would bore them sick, just as it does me. Anyway, there's no use taking about it; Kit and I have just about decided we'll go abroad."

"Suit yourself," he answered.

At his acquiescence, her tone sweetened, and she showed her pretty, even little teeth set in the familiar wilful smile. "You like it up on the farm, dear," she said, "and there's nothing to prevent your going there all you want; but that's no reason why the rest of us should go."

"No reason why the rest of us should go where?" came a voice from the doorway. In a bouffant frock with a tubular silk bodice like the stem of a green plant, from which her pretty head and shoulders bloomed triumphantly, Katherine lounged into the room. "What's she putting over on you now, old dear?" she asked her father.

"Katherine, Katherine," Leta reproved, but her daughter was not be daunted.

"Oh, I know that little smile of yours, Mother," she said. Her tulle skirt belled lightly at her sides as she seated herself in a thronelike chair. "Haven't I faced it, man and boy, for lo these nineteen years?"

"Your father wants us to spend the summer on the farm," Leta informed her.

"Oh, Gawd!" Katherine sank into a burlesque

collapse from which she instantly emerged, protesting. "I'm going to Europe; that's where I'm going." She looked at her mother accusingly. "I thought you said it was settled."

"It's for your father to decide," said Leta primly; whereupon Katherine turned her guns upon him. "You must remember, Father, that I haven't been able to go over since 1914, when I was a mere child. Every soul we know's going this summer."

"I wasn't insisting on New Hampshire," he told her. "If you and your mother want to go to Europe, you can go, of course. Have you talked to Jim? Will he go, too?"

"That's the least of my worries," said Kit, and rose quickly as the butler appeared, announcing to her that Mr. Haviland was in the reception room.

"Be right there," she said.

"Where are you going, dear?" asked Alan.

"Oh, out dancing. So long." And she vanished.

Troubled, he turned to his wife. "Don't you think, Leta, that we ought to know something about where she's going?"

"Oh, it's all right," she told him placidly. "They don't know, themselves. All of them do it—it's the style to be casual."

"Just the same," he said, "I'd like to know."

"She's with Bud Haviland, and they're pretty sure to run into a lot of other youngsters. Kit does seem a little flighty sometimes, I know," she went on, "but her judgment's pretty good. Of course, the youngsters nowadays do things we weren't allowed to do, but it's a different age. Our upbringing-

ing was ridiculously narrow, and I've brought up my daughter to face life as it is. I was telling Bud that, only the other day."

"You like Bud?" Alan asked; and when Leta replied that Bud's elder sister was the Countess of Stroude, he understood that to her there was nothing irrelevant in the answer.

Leta presently left to keep an engagement for bridge whereupon Alan settled down to study some company reports, but he was tired to-night, and his mind kept drifting away from the figures before him. After a time, he put the papers aside and with folded hands sat staring abstractedly at a tapestry on the wall behind the huge carved table. Was there any connection, he wondered, between his success downtown and his discontent? Would life have been so very different if, fourteen years ago, he had declined John Broderick's offer? What if he had remained in Chicago? Would he have been happier?

To-night he was resentful of New York. The move from Chicago, as he saw it in his present humour, was not something he had brought about himself but something that had happened to him, and there were times—like to-night—when he told himself that, if he could relive the past, he would stay in the Midwest. Looking back, he felt that a sort of violence had been done him, a not unkindly violence, the violence of a generosity so great that to refuse had been impossible. Gently, irresistibly, a golden arm had reached for him, uprooted him, and set him down in the metropolis.

His case, he realized now, was not unusual. New

York, in spite of its teeming population, was, it would appear, unable to produce in sufficient number men capable of handling large affairs. Again and again he met with "typical New Yorkers" who, like himself, had been called in from outside—this one from the South, that one from New England, but most from the Midwest.

At the outset his Aunt Martha had perceived an underlying significance in the change. "With your generation," she had said, "the tide is turning." According to her theory, strength went where it was most needed; in the early days it had flowed into the western wilderness, but, now that the West was wilderness no more, the depleted East was calling back the grandsons of the pioneers.

Alan was still in a reflective mood when, shortly after eleven, he went to his room. Beside his bed stood a water bottle on a silver tray, and he wondered at the sharp feeling of annoyance aroused in him by the sight of the crest with which the tray was engraved. New York had changed Leta, and this was part of it. She had dug up, somewhere, a Wheelock coat of arms which appeared on her silverware, her stationery, and the doors of both her cars.

Yet what did it matter? If it gave Leta any pleasure to use what Jim called "the family trademark," or to acquire an Eastern accent, what harm was there in that? When a couple had been married twenty-three years, naturally each knew every foible of the other. Lucky for them if their grievances against each other were as trivial as his and Leta's! The thing about her that disturbed him most was

her attitude toward their old Chicago friends. Secretly he had been glad that Leta was away when Frank Murphy came to New York three weeks before. Had she been at home, Frank would have expected to be invited to the house, and such a visit, Alan knew, would have bored his wife. Nor was Frank so dull that he would have failed to perceive it.

Delia, on her recent visit, had seen clearly enough! Leta's manner toward her, especially before the servants, had been condescending. Delia had been so hurt; after three days she had gone home. Alan wished now that he hadn't asked her to come—it gave him a sick feeling to think of her disappointment.

Lying in bed, he considered the situation between Leta and himself, trying to look at matters from her side. If Leta and he were jangling, the fault was doubtless as much his as hers. Absorbed in business, his tendency had been to avoid social life; and social life meant everything to her. In that department he had failed her. Undoubtedly, she found his attitude toward many of her new friends as trying as he found her attitude toward their old friends. Bridge as a perpetual pastime became tiresome, and the kind of people Leta had at her dinner parties and other gatherings made him uncomfortably aware of his own ineptitude at small talk. Even as a boy he had been reticent, and with time the quality had grown upon him. Only in business was reticence an asset, and he knew that Leta had often been irritated by his lack of those social gifts which, in such full

measure, she possessed. That, unfortunately, he could not remedy, but he must try to make himself as little an impediment to her as possible. He must display more interest in her parties, and must make another effort to overcome his distaste for the continued routine of bridge.

As he became sleepy his thoughts ran in circles. Bridge . . . People quarrelled over it, criticized each other as if it were important. But he would play. The next time she played, he would play, too. It was the least he could do . . . play bridge. . .

Dimly he became aware of loud talk in the hall. The voices were persistent; they disturbed him, calling him back from the borderland of sleep.

Why, it was Kit! She was shouting at someone. He switched on the light, got out of bed, and slipped into his dressing gown.

"I don't care! It's none of your business!" He could hear her distinctly through the closed door. "You made a fool of me—you made a fool of me!" Her voice rose. "Don't you shush *me*! I don't give a damn *who* hears!"

Reaching the door, Alan flung it open and looked down the hall. Kit, with her head thrown back, was glaring at her brother.

"Damn you!" she screamed. "I'll get even with you!" She struck at him, but he caught her by the wrists.

"Go to bed, you little idiot!" Jim spoke in an undertone.

"Kit! Children! What's the matter with you? What's all this about?"

Jim was silent, but Kit swung toward her father, crying:

"He's been butting into my affairs again! He made a fool of me in public!"

"*I* made a fool of you?"

"I was never so ashamed in my life!" she proclaimed hotly. "He made a scene—he came over to our table and took hold of me, practically dragged me out, in front of all those people! Bud Haviland will never speak to me again!"

"Not if I can help it, he won't," asserted Jim, "the drunken little bounder!"

"Since you've got so sanctimonious," she sneered, "what were you doing there yourself?"

"Bumming," he admitted placidly.

"Spying on me, you mean!"

"Stop this!" Alan ordered sharply. "Go to your rooms, both of you."

"Why, certainly!" As Kit, with a laugh, shrill and theatrical, moved away, he stood looking after her. At the end of the corridor her step wavered, and she steadied herself against the wall.

"She's not a bad kid, Dad," Jim said quickly. "It's just that she goes with a rowdy bunch—the juvenile cocktail class."

Alan turned toward the living room.

"I'll 'phone her mother to come home."

Having telephoned, he remained in his chair, staring at the portrait of his grandfather that hung above the mantelpiece. . . . His grandfather!

Suddenly, like an avalanche, there came over him a sense of the remoteness of Zenas Wheelock's era. Had he lived in mediæval times, the change between his day and this could hardly have been greater. Everything was changed—the spirit of the country, its mode of life, its manners, its morals, even its racial stock. The last of the pioneers was gone.

But hold on!—pioneering hadn't ended yet. It never would end. That was something Alan had just begun to understand. Every venture a man took, every experiment he tried with life, was pioneering. The difference was that Zenas Wheelock, migrating into the Midwestern wilderness, had fully realized the dangers he was facing; whereas Alan, moving with his family to New York, had been possessed by a delusion of security. Nevertheless, as he had learned, the dangers had been there. Subtle, corrosive dangers—the silken dangers of a civilization intrenched and secure.

Absorbed in gloomy thought, he fancied himself alone in the room until he felt a hand upon his shoulder and heard Jim's voice.

"I'm awfully sorry, Dad."

"Thanks, old man. I'll wait for Mother. No need of your sitting up."

"All right." The hand slipped from its place. "Good-night. I'm sorry—sorry as the deuce."

As the door closed behind his son, Alan's eyes stung with sudden tears. Jim had stooped impulsively and brushed his cheek in a swift caress.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE telegram from Blanche failed to say why she was coming East, what her plans were, whether or not she was alone; it merely gave the time of her arrival; and a certain apprehension was mixed with Alan's eagerness as he left his office on this hot August afternoon and boarded a subway express for Grand Central Station.

He had seen but little of Blanche and Ray even when they were living in New York. Ray's supercilious attitude toward him and Leta's indifference to the old friendship had caused them gradually to drift apart. This telegram was his first word from Blanche in the year and a half that had passed since Ray had taken his family to California. He couldn't believe that Ray was really jealous of him—that would be too ridiculous—but his habit of nagging was such that Blanche found it simpler to avoid an exchange of letters.

Ray, Alan reflected, had always been a law unto himself. The eccentricities of his boyhood had with the years become more pronounced, and Alan had long since ceased trying to guess what he would do or what would become of him. He thought of the last time he had seen him. Who but Ray, having dined at a man's house and sneered at him for being

prosperous, could call next day at his office to ask a considerable financial favour? And who but Ray could accept that favour with such a mocking air? Yet the motive behind his request, Alan reminded himself, had been creditable. Ray had given up a good editorial position in New York and moved to California for the sake of his daughter's health.

Like some Apocalyptic monster racing across a jungle, the express roared through the dark forest of steel posts. What had happened to them all out there in California? How was Dorothy getting on? Was Ray still writing for the movies, or had he gone off on some other tangent? And Blanche—it always gave him a little heartache to think of Blanche. Instead of making life easier, her gentleness and generosity had made it hard.

At Grand Central he left the packed express and amid a crowd of commuters made his way through farther reaches of the city's underground world to the vast hushed concourse of the station, where presently he stood at a rope barrier with an expectant group awaiting the Limited from the West.

In the darkness beyond the gate he saw the lighted train creep in and heard the sigh of the air-brakes as it came to a stop. Several men with travelling-bags came hurrying out of the gate and swiftly scattered, forerunners of the less hasty multitude in which the caps of baggage-laden porters were bright red polka-dots. An eager-faced girl standing beside Alan caught her breath and called aloud: "Mac, Mac! Here I am!" The blond young man heard and bolted toward her, oblivious of the angry looks of people whom

he jostled with his suitcase. Alan glimpsed two radiant faces as they linked arms and moved away, but in an instant they had dropped completely from his mind, for now, slender in black satin, Blanche was coming through the gate.

In a taxicab she settled back with a contented sigh and there was a faint smile on her face as she turned toward him with a glance of friendly appraisal. On the drive to the hotel they talked of trifling things, commenting amiably upon each other's looks, exchanging bits of news, and it was not until they were at dinner on the balcony of a roof garden, high above the smoke and noise of the city, that she told him what had brought her to New York.

"I've left Ray. It's a little movie girl, awfully pretty, and"—she smiled ruefully—"young, of course."

"I'm so sorry."

"I've been surprised to find out how little I care," she said. "I *did* care the first time—long ago, when we were in Paris; but it seems he hasn't the power to hurt me any more. He's just a person I know—a person I know and am sorry for. I used to tell myself that if I stood by he might stop doing these things, but I've come to see it's no use. This time he was so open about it that I had to bring Dorothy away. I've left her with Aunt Martha in Chicago until I decide what to do."

She would like, she told him, to take Dorothy to the country for the rest of the summer, preferably to the house in New Hampshire which she had inherited from her mother's aunt; that, however, she

supposed was impossible, since the house was rented; but Alan smiled. "I think we can arrange that. It's just the place for you and Dorothy," he said.

Blanche was delighted. "And I can afford to fix it up now," she told him. "Father's estate is settled, and I have a little income."

"It won't need much fixing up," said Alan, and spoke of improvements made by the tenant.

"Alan," she said abruptly, "I want to ask you a question. Where did Ray get that money just before we went to California? Did he get it from you?"

He hesitated for an instant. "It wasn't a great deal," he answered, "and I was glad to let him have it, because of Dorothy."

"Because of Dorothy?"

"Her health," he explained.

"Why, there's been nothing wrong with her health."

"Oh, hasn't there?" He looked at her blankly.

"So that's what he told you, is it?" Her tone was bitter.

"But, Blanche—what difference does it make now? You've left him—he's nothing to you any more. Why trouble over things that are past?"

"To think that he would use Dorothy as an excuse! To think that he would—would come to *you*!"

"Please," he urged, "please, dear! Those things are all over now. Let's just be happy."

"All right—*let's!*" A determined brightness came over her face. "We'll pretend there isn't anything unpleasant in the world. Life is just one glorious

fairly tale of roof gardens and music and sole à la *Marguéry*."

"That's it!" he approved. "And I'm twenty-one and you're eighteen."

"No, sir! The woman's the one to settle the ages. I'm nine. This is my ninth birthday party, and you've just stuck a decalcomania picture on my face."

"You remember that?" He was surprised. "I'll bet you don't remember what the picture was."

"Yes, I do—a poodle jumping through a hoop."

"Right! I didn't think any one else in the world hung on to the foolish little memories that I've hung on to."

"What trifles made us happy then," she said reflectively. "Games in the lots, sodas at Hubbard's, park phaëton rides——"

"Don't forget the caves and bonfires," he put in, "and my shanty in the tree."

"I should say not! I tore my stocking climbing up there—remember?"

"Yes, and our bicycles——"

"And summer evenings," she reminded him, "when dear old Grandpa Wheelock told stories, and we'd sit quietly on the steps by the lilac bush, hoping the grown-ups wouldn't remember it was past our bedtime."

The western sky, hanging like a vast curtain beyond the maplike area of roofs, was fading from rose colour to a purplish gray, and this grayness, spread above the city like a covering of gauze, seemed to muffle the dull rumble of the streets below, outlined

now by rows of diamond lights. Time, it seemed to him, had made Blanche only the more beautiful. The glow of the table lamp, finding its way beneath the brim of her hat, showed golden lights in her hair, and flecks of gold in her hazel eyes—eyes lovelier for an expression of sadness, of knowledge accepted placidly yet not without regret.

“What are you going to do with the old house in Oakland?” he asked her.

“Willie’s going to live there. He’s turned out splendidly, you know, and his wife is as nice as she can be.”

“So I’ve heard. I was afraid you might be going back there.”

“Oh, no.” She shook her head slowly. “I used to think I’d like to go back, but I’ve come to realize that it wasn’t Oakland I was longing for. It was my girlhood—when Mother was alive, and her garden was there, and you and I used to run back and forth through the old gate.”

“Yes.” The mention of the garden and the gate brought back the memory, poignant despite long years that intervened, of the evening when through the darkness he hurried after her and thrust into her hand the little box that held the friendship ring.

To be with Blanche again, to listen to her voice accompanied by the music drifting out to them, to hear her speak of the old Oakland days, filled him with a warm glow of contentment. The long gaps between their meetings instantly disappeared when they were together; talking with her seemed always like resuming a conversation of yesterday—like

resuming youth itself. With startling force there came upon him the feeling that if he and Blanche could go there, if they could hurry back together, they would rediscover the Oakland of long ago.

Ah, if only they *could* go back and find it all again!

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE picture of Blanche that Alan took away with him that night was curiously repeated some days later. Not, however, by Blanche herself, but by her daughter, Dorothy. For during the talk at the roof garden table it had been arranged that Blanche should leave immediately for New Hampshire, to settle her recaptured house, while Alan, whose business would soon take him West, should bring Dorothy back from Chicago to join her mother.

So now, in a Pullman compartment, as the train drew out of La Salle Street Station, he found himself studying the girl with a shyness that half amused him.

Though Dorothy, at twenty-one, was taller than Blanche, and though her hair and eyes were darker, she still resembled her; but more than her appearance it was her character that continually reminded Alan of her mother. She had Blanche's attentiveness in conversation, even to the little mannerism of tilting her head and widening her eyes when listening, and an endearing gentleness was visible in her face and audible in her voice.

For Alan, although the resemblance had its note of sweetness, it also had its disturbing side. Indeed, during the day and the long evening that they were

together on the train, it was oddly he and not the girl who was self-conscious, ill at ease. In the first place, he had the perplexity of middle age in the presence of youth; but, deeper than that was his exquisite, almost sacred sense, of having Blanche herself again before him, the Blanche of a generation ago.

It was not unnatural that this chastened and artless state of mind should do its own work—if, consciously or unconsciously, the winning of Dorothy's friendship were his main end. Little by little she began of her own accord to unfold, and even, in time, to take the reins in her own hands. Alan was inordinately pleased when they settled themselves in the taxi at Boston, and Dorothy, taking off her hat, ran her hands unconventionally through her close-cropped hair. "Do you know," she exclaimed, "it seems as if we had been travelling together for years and years?"

And when they got into Alan's own motor at Portsmouth, that evening, he knew that he had won, for Dorothy gave his arm a little squeeze: "I hope you don't mind," she suggested, "but I've really got to call you 'Uncle Alan.'"

Driving back into the country, he spoke of the old friendship between his forbears and hers. "We'll be neighbours up here as our grandparents and great-grandparents were—in the same two houses," he said, and told her of papers he had found in his attic showing that his great-grandfather and her great-great-grandfather had joined in importing casks of rum from the West Indies, and furniture and chinaware from Europe.

"Oh, I can't wait to see the house!" she cried when the headlights picked out a white fence bordering a narrow lane into which they were turning; and, though Blanche had supper ready for them, Dorothy, before eating, must needs make a tour of the house, exclaiming over the delicate stair rail, the corner cupboards, and the huge fireplace with its iron crane.

"I've had a remarkable tenant," explained Blanche, looking at Alan. "I realized that even before I found out who he was."

"Just a little paint and wall paper did it," he said, smiling. "Come, Dorothy, you'll have plenty of time to see the place to-morrow, after I have gone."

For Dorothy, at least, no sweeter homecoming could have been imagined; but, Alan in his own case, had no such feeling as, on the following evening, he drove through the stifling heat of the New York streets toward his apartment.

To his surprise, he found Jim awaiting him.

"Why, my dear boy! When did you land?"

"We docked late this afternoon."

"How are your mother and Kit?"

Jim frowned as he sat down. "That's what I want to talk to you about. They've taken up with some people in Paris—a pretty swift lot—and there's one of them, a Count Bordolini, that seems to have Kit hypnotized. You know the kind: one of those slickers—like a good-looking waiter—that makes a hit with women by kissing their hands."

"Did you discuss him with your mother?"

"Yes, and she raked me over the coals for it. Mother and Kit have the idea they're terribly sophisticated, but if you want to know what I think, I think they need a guardian."

"Well," commented Alan, "I'm glad you're back, at any rate. Did they say when they expect to sail?"

"No."

"I'll cable and find out." Alan was silent for a moment, looking speculatively at his son.

"And now, old man, let's talk about you. Have you decided what you want to do with yourself?"

Jim shook his head. "I'm sorry to say I haven't. I know I ought to go to work and stick at something, but——"

"No special inclinations, eh?"

"I'd enjoy getting a job on a ship and going round the world——"

"There's nothing in that sort of thing. It's just a boy's craving for adventure."

"I suppose it is."

"You're twenty-three, and you've seen a lot more of the world than most boys of your age." He looked up and suddenly he felt the same hesitation as when he had faced Dorothy. "I've been hoping you might want to come down and go to work for us."

Jim sighed. "I'd go crazy in one of those cages, counting money and rubber-stamping checks."

"Well, then, how would you like a job with McClintock in the Oklahoma oilfields?"

"That sounds a little better—I'm sick of this town."

"Well, then, why not go up to the farm for a while and think it over? In the meantime I'll get in touch with McClintock."

The idea met with a better response than Alan had expected. In fact, Jim had already left for New Hampshire by the time Alan received Leta's reply to his cable. Her message told only that she was writing and, when at last her letter came, he understood the reason for her earlier reticence.

"Since you couldn't see your way clear to taking a suitable house, there is no use in our coming back for the present. Kit is at an age where she ought to have an interesting social life, and Paris gives her just the background she needs. We are in a charming and influential circle here and we expect to go to England in the spring to be presented at Court.

"I fear Jim may have been giving you a prejudiced view of our friends. His attitude toward foreigners is extremely provincial and at times he was positively rude. . . ."

The letter mentioned Count Bordolini, speaking of his ancient lineage, his elegance. Clearly, Leta was endeavouring to justify her course; but, the more Alan read, the more he was troubled.

Kit, inexperienced and headstrong, needed wise handling and there was no blinking the fact that Leta was failing in her duty. The years had not steadied her; her judgment, her sense of values, had been corrupted by prosperity and her estimates of people were based more and more on qualities purely superficial.

The thing for him to do was to get them home at once. He cabled Leta, but again her reply referred him to a letter she was writing, and again he was compelled to wait.

The missive, arriving more than a week later, announced that she had taken a house in Paris for the winter.

"You have never appreciated the necessity of doing what you should for the children in a social way. I realized this keenly when Jim was over here, and I am determined that Kit shall not be handicapped, as he has been, by the lack of a civilized social background. Already her experience over here, with the right sort of people, has worked wonders. Count Bordolini is deeply interested in her.

"The Bordolinis were a famous family as far back as the Fifteenth Century, being connected by marriage with the Medicis themselves. The Count is handsome and thoroughly a man of the world. He has large estates in Calabria, and I understand that the ancestral home is a veritable museum of old masters, *cinquecento* furniture and other treasures. It would, of course, be a brilliant match for Kit.

"I know you are sufficiently familiar with the European point of view to realize that, if things turn out as I hope, a settlement will be necessary. Kit and I rely upon you to be generous."

Leta's enthusiasm for Count Bordolini was not, however, shared by the Parisian correspondent of

Broderick & Co., whose cabled report on the Italian had, for several days, been in Alan's possession.

The Count, said the report, had been known in Paris for more than a dozen years as an adventurer who made a specialty of cultivating rich Americans. He was believed to have a small income which he supplemented by gambling. A few years since, he had been co-respondent in a celebrated divorce case and he was at present living with a woman appearing in one of the music halls.

Alan cabled Leta:

"Have unfavourable report on person in question. Essential you keep Kit away from him until my arrival. Sailing Saturday."

The following three days he spent in making hurried arrangements for his absence; and on Friday night after dining alone in his apartment, he put in a long-distance call for Jim. Presently the telephone bell rang, but it was not New Hampshire.

"Mr. Wheelock?" asked an unfamiliar voice.

"Yes."

The other mentioned the name of a morning newspaper, and continued: "We have news from our Paris bureau that your daughter married Count Bordolini yesterday."

The telephone instrument in Alan's hand suddenly became heavy, and he lowered it to the arm of his chair.

"Well?"

"Wasn't it rather sudden?" asked the reporter.

"Not at all."

"Then the match has your approval?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you, Mr. Wheelock."

Slowly Alan replaced the receiver on the hook. For a time he sat stunned, trying to grasp the full significance of the disaster. He was still in a daze when presently the telephone rang again, and he found himself speaking to Jim, telling him what had happened. . . .

The clock struck. It was two. He realized he had better go to bed. Through the long night he lay awake, now grieving for Kit, now thinking bitterly of Leta.

At breakfast next morning he picked up the newspaper that lay, as usual, by his plate.

WEALTHY NEW YORK GIRL MARRIES ITALIAN TITLE

At sight of the headline he dropped the paper under the table; then, having drunk his coffee, he telephoned his secretary to cancel his passage. "I'm going to New Hampshire," he said, "and I don't know just when I'll be back."

The secretary, who had evidently seen the story, wished to be sympathetic. "Hadn't I better come over there, Mr. Wheelock? Can't I get your railroad tickets?" But Alan told him he would go by motor, and soon he was driving northward on the Concourse.

Hour after hour he drove on, gaining a kind of savage solace from the handling of the car, from the speed, and the sense of escape it gave him. It was

raining as he skirted Boston that evening, but the skies had cleared and the moon was shining when he sped through the streets of sleeping Portsmouth and swung inland on the highway leading to the farm. He passed Blanche's house, a silvery blue in the moonlight, and turned into his own lane.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IT WAS afternoon when Alan awoke. Presently, hearing a step in the hall, he called, and Jim came in.

"Hello, Dad—feeling rested?"

"Yes."

By tacit consent they avoided mentioning Kit, talking instead of Alan's drive from New York, and of the motor launch, in which a new engine had been installed.

"Dorothy 'phoned a little while ago," said Jim, after a moment. "Her mother said to come over whenever you feel like it, and she's expecting you for dinner."

"Good."

"Have you heard from Mr. McClintock yet about that Oklahoma oil job?"

"No, he's still away."

"How much do you think he'd be willing to pay me?"

"I don't know. He started Robbins at a hundred and sixty."

"A hundred and sixty. Let's see—that's about thirty-five a week. Well, how much would I be worth to Broderick & Co?"

Alan raised himself slightly on the pillows, regard-

ing his son with puzzled eyes. "Thirty-five or forty a week," he answered.

"Forty a week, eh? All right, I'll take it." Jim spoke decisively. "I don't know as I'd want to work for Mr. McClintock, anyway, after he's kept me waiting around like this." Leaning on the foot of the bed, apparently absorbed in thought, he went on: "I've been considering this matter pretty carefully in the last few days, and it seems to me I'd be a fool to pass up a good start such as I could get with your firm. For instance, Dad, how much would you say I ought to be making at the end of a year?"

"Fifty or sixty a week, possibly."

"Sixty?" Silently Jim computed. "That's thirty-one hundred a year." His eyes twinkled suddenly. "Suppose a fellow would give up his summer vacation. Would they allow him something extra for that?"

"You get two weeks with salary, anyway."

"Yes—so if I kept on working those two weeks, wouldn't I be entitled to double pay?"

"That question has not arisen that I know of," Alan smiled. "In fact, I doubt that we've ever employed such a man."

"Well, then," declared Jim, still smiling, "the novelty of it ought to bring down the house—the earnest young man who persists in working while others play. Or doesn't the 'Onward and Upward' stuff go in Wall Street to-day?"

The mockery in the lad's voice did not upset his father, for underneath he detected a base of resolve

that did good to his heart. He returned his son's smile. "We'll start you a week from Monday."

"Fine!" Jim moved to the chiffonier, took up a brush, and with care pressed into place a lone up-standing lock; and Alan, watching, remembered how, twenty-five years before, he, too, had struggled with a similar rebellious lock.

"Well, I'll see you over there at dinner," said Jim, moving toward the door; and a little later Alan, looking from the window as he dressed, saw him striding swiftly toward the boathouse. From the river came presently the hum of the engine, diminishing as the launch ran downstream.

Through the old bluish glass of his bedroom window Alan had formerly been able to see the white peak of Blanche's house with the fan-shaped green shutters under the roof, but to-day he noticed for the first time that the view had been cut off by thickening foliage in the intervening fields. Now that Blanche herself was there, he wished always to be able to see her house. That view must be reopened.

Having lunched, he went out into an afternoon of gold and scarlet. Stirred by a soft breeze, the leaves of the sugar maples at the roadside sparkled like red and yellow flame, and he felt a pang of sadness as he saw that some of them were falling. Halfway down the arc of the western sky the sun was a golden blur behind a curtain of autumnal mist which gave the distant hills a purple bloom like that of ripened grapes.

As he walked up the lane toward Blanche's house, she emerged from the old white doorway, a welcoming

figure crossing the lawn to meet him, and at the sight of her, he found himself delighting anew in her look of indomitable youth. "We're not old," he was telling himself, "we're *not* old yet!" And for him there was magic even in the gesture of her hand, held out as he drew near.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said, but she did not speak of his trouble. "I was afraid you might not get here before the dahlias and zinnias were gone."

He followed her to the garden where flowers flashed richly at the slanting sun; and Alan, discovering a subtle harmony between her golden colouring and the blooms of autumn, thought that no other woman in the world could have graced so perfectly this glowing background.

Presently, on a garden bench, he found himself telling of the exchange of cables, culminating in Kit's marriage.

"Isn't it possible," she suggested hopefully, "that things may turn out better than you think?"

By way of answer, he handed her the cabled report on Bordolini.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, when she had read it.

"What can I do? The man is Kit's husband now, and we must make the best of it—as long as she does." Abstractedly he was tearing the cablegram into tiny bits.

"That's like you," she said. "You've always been so good."

"Yes, damn it," he answered slowly, bitterly.

"I suppose I have. That's what's the matter with me. Old Sobersides. Good, reliable, uninteresting." He was staring away toward the purple hills. "What do people gain by being good? What have I gained? Nothing! I've made a fine mess of my life!"

"Alan! You haven't!"

"To my wife and daughter," he pursued, "I'm nothing but a checkbook." He gazed at her reflectively. "*You've* been good, too," he accused. "What have you gained by it?"

"It's true my life hasn't been happy, but I——"

"Well," he broke in impatiently, "what do we want out of life *except* happiness?"

She was silent, looking down at a yellow dahlia in her lap.

"Blanche," he said, leaning over her, "I've loved you since we were youngsters. Do you remember the day, ages ago, when we went down to see my grandfather march in a parade? I was in love with you then. It made me cranky, and I didn't know what was the matter with me. I was in love with you when we were in Miss Claypool's room at Oakland School, and I wanted to show you I was, so I sold my cigarette pictures and bought you a little silver ring made out of a dime—with your initials and mine on a bangle. I wonder if you remember?"

"The cardboard box is coming apart," she told him, smiling.

"Blanche! You've kept it?"

She nodded. "Do you know the song, 'The Little Silver Ring That Once Thou Gavest Me'? I've always thought of it as being our song."

"I'll never forget the night I gave it to you," he said. "I had made up a little speech for the occasion, but when I caught up with you, I couldn't remember a word of it, so I just shoved the box into your hand and ran. Afterward I was terribly embarrassed. I was wondering how you felt about it, and what other people would say if they knew. To me it was our engagement ring, but of course I wouldn't have told you so for anything in the world."

"I wish you had," she murmured.

He bent over and took her hands.

"Dearest, you and I made our mistakes long ago—both of us. The big tragedy of my life was your marriage, and everything you've suffered since—even things I didn't know about—has made me suffer. Haven't we paid, dear—haven't we paid?"

The sun was low, and from beyond the shrubbery and trees, now casting long shadows across the garden, came the hum of a motor launch.

"Who cares about us?" Alan demanded. "Who cares a hundredth part as much as we care for each other? You've left Ray; and Leta has shown that I mean nothing to her. It's *our* turn now—God knows we've waited long enough!"

She faced him, her eyes filled with a tender light.

"Do you believe we could be happy?"

"Of course we could! Happier than any other two people in the world! Happier because of the very things we've had to suffer. It's going to be all the more beautiful, all the more glorious, when we've come into our own at last!"

As he waited, bending toward her and clinging to

her hands, the hush of the garden was broken by the sound of voices, faint in the distance, and a girl's gay laughter.

Blanche drew away from him and he saw that tears were in her eyes.

"No, dear," she said in a choking voice. "It would never, never do."

"We have a right to happiness!" he insisted passionately.

"Have we? I don't know. The world won't turn back for us, Alan. We can't undo what's done. It might be well enough for some people, but not—not for you and me. We can't find happiness that way."

Nearer, now, the voices of Jim and Dorothy sounded from the slope below.

"They're fond of each other, dear," Blanche said. "We can't find happiness at their expense."

Softly she laid her hand on Alan's. "But you and I know," she whispered, "that some of the most beautiful things in the world are the things that never happen."

She rose, looking expectantly down the winding path. And as she stood there, with misty sunlight shimmering on her face and hair, she was transfigured, it seemed to him, by an unearthly radiance.





